Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies
JICS 2025, 1: 180-193
DOI: 10.29329/almamater.2025.1286.11

War and Peace à la Japonaise Takarazuka Revue's Interpretation of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*

Maria Mihaela Grajdian[1]

Abstract

Based on more than two decades of on-site fieldwork comprised of extensive phenomenological experiences and detailed empiric inquiries with both producers and consumers of Japanese popular culture and, distinctively, of the Japanese all-female musical theater Takarazuka Revue Company's performances as well as of comprehensive archival literature research, this paper aims at hermeneutically elucidating the underlying mechanisms within the dramaturgic conglomerate, conveying and inspiring "change", both textually and contextually, as an inescapable force constantly pushing history forward, by means of critically investigating Takarazuka Revue's interpretation of Giuseppe Verdi's opera Aida (1871): while A Song for Kingdoms's initial version in 2003 emphasized the important of peace on the background of unprecedented public debates on the function of the "self-defense forces", its re-iteration in 2015 re-calibrated the narrative line by bringing into foreground the role played by individual choices and responsibility and following 2014's glamorous celebration of 100 years since Takarazuka Revue's foundation in 1914. The key-element in this endeavor is the redefinition of "war and peace" as solely two further parameters in the flow of historically driven "change" which itself is conceptualized as a self-aware choice, empowering the late-modern individual to dare powerful transformations as part of a greater whole, liberating him-/herself from the constraints of an existence in the shadows of mindless consumerism and "quiet desperation".

Keywords: Musical theater, opera, (re-)negotiation of modernity, late-modern hierarchies of values, human diversity.

1. Introduction: re-thinking the classics

Although we are living in times of tremendous change which occasionally supersedes by far our capability to adapt to continuously new technologies and realities, some things seem to stay forever the same: Emotions are typical examples for the human beings' resistance to rationally motivated evolution, partly because emotions are biologically ingrained in our survival instinct as a species. Emotions and our responses to them grant the human species survival at all costs through mechanisms of perception and processing which are located outside – below, above, in parallel – to the conscious, intellectual self. Moreover, more often

[1] Assoc. Prof. Dr., School of Integrated Arts and Sciences, Department of Integrated Global Studies, Hiroshima University, Japan, grajdian@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

How to cite this article: Grajdian, M. M. (2025). 1901 War and Peace à la Japonaise Takarazuka Revue's Interpretation of Giuseppe Verdi's Aida. In: *Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies 2:1*, 180-193.
Submitted: 24.12.2024
Accepted: 26.02.2025

This article is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

than not, survival of the species implies the sacrifice of the individual, sometimes to an unfathomable degree. Arts, particularly performative arts, confront us with the tragedy of individual sacrifice in the name of collective progress, transcending the time and space of historical-geographical determination. One such baffling case is the Italian opera *Aida* (1871) and its Japanese counterpart *A Song for Kingdoms* (2003, 2015).

The current paper observes critically Takarazuka Revue Company's 宝塚歌劇団 adaptation of Giuseppe Verdi's and Antonio Ghislanzoni's opera *Aida* (1871) with particular focus on the transformation of the tragedy into a drama of hope in Takarazuka Revue Company's re-iteration in 2003 and in 2015 as *A Song for Kingdoms* 『王家に捧ぐ歌』: While star troupe's 2003 version carries the subtle but powerful metamorphose of message from "peace is the highest and the most precious of ideals of all humans", cosmos troupe's re-make from 2015 conveys the main idea that "in order to attain and keep peace, there are times when war is necessary". In doing so, Takarazuka Revue Company's interpretation of *Aida* as *A Song for Kingdoms* re-evaluates the meaning of war and peace and their – suddenly – dialectic relationship. It is true that in times pf peace, political stability is achieved and economic prosperity follows (Bauman, 2004, Castells, 1998). At the same time, the weakening of the social bonds and the simmering feelings of discontent, resentment and envy underneath the surface of sociocultural harmony lead gradually to a general sense of ennui which, sooner rather than later, leads to open aggressiveness out of boredom and a general atmosphere of nothing really happening, of stagnation and eventually of decline accelerating into collapse (Miegel, 2007, p. 132; Bhabha, 2004; Dalio, 2021; Giddens, 2020). The 2003 version appealed to audiences' need for safety and security, exclusively focusing on peaceful cooperation and blissful togetherness, the 2015 version underscored the dangers of complacency and the illusions of self-sufficiency in a world plagued by scarcity, suffering and unstoppable armed conflicts. The solution proposed by Takarazuka Revue is one of pragmatic simplicity as well as fine-tuning to the international community with the simultaneous move towards a more proactive presence on the global stage.

Traditionally associated with strictly conservative gender politics and socio-economic hierarchies, military-like instruction methods and performance standards which transcend the wildest expectations while pushing the entertainment industry beyond the limitations of technological progress, fans' requirements and technokrats' visions, Takarazuka Revue 宝塚歌劇[2] has been accompanying Japan since its foundation in 1914 (Stickland, 2008; Watanabe, 1999; Yamanashi, 2012). Simultaneously a faithful mirror of Japanese society and a lucid barometer-like institution for the future, Takarazuka Revue's hallmark is its all-female cast impersonating both male (男役 *otokoyaku*) and female (娘役 *musumeyaku*) roles divided in five performing troupes which bring on the stages of the two major theaters in West-Japan (Takarazuka Grand Theater in the city of Takarazuka) and in East-Japan (Tokyo Takarazuka Theater in the posh district of Ginza in Japan's capital) during ten weekly performances throughout the entire year a huge diversity of topics covering all genres and historical-

[2] Takarazuka Revue is the mass-media phenomenon whereas Takarazuka Revue Company is the fiscal entity. Takarazuka Revue administrators did not possess a specific level of fiscal awareness before 1945 so that they changed the names of the institution several times in accordance with the political tendencies of the time.

geographical areas (Tsuganesawa, 1991; Watanabe, 2002).[3] These are embedded in theatrical live performances with Western popular music, laborious choreographies and impressing singing acts, luxurious stage designs, sparkling – and quickly changing – costumes compounded by discrete displays of individual excellence. Moreover, since 1974's blockbuster *The Rose of Versailles* 『ベルサイユのばら』, Takarazuka Revue has been essentially circumscribing the so-called *shôjo* culture (少女文化 *shôjo bunka*): the framework delineating femininity, feminine identity and feminine corporeality by means of instrumentalizing female teenagers within Japan's rapacious systems juxtaposing consumerism, sexuality and public discourses on love, marriage, reproduction (Kawasaki, 2005; Allison, 2013). In recent years, especially since the beginning of the new era in Japanese historiography in 2019 (the Reiwa period) and even more accelerated since the big reset posited by the global pandemic of 2020-2022, a tremendous paradigms shift has been occurring with a renewed focus on expanding the traditional business model centered around "deep fandom" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 36; Nehring, 1997), referring to a rigidly delineated fan community composed mainly of stay-at-home housewives and female financially powerful seniors, aged 35 and above, towards a more diverse consumers' basis to include male theater-goers of all ages, reflected in correspondingly diversified performances to encompass a greater variety of preferences, interests and ideals.

The current analysis consists of two main parts: the description and hermeneutic interpretation of *Aida* and *A Song of Kingdoms*. Essential departing points are the plot and the characters' construction which provide in both cases valuable insights into the structures of their respective eras in Italy and Egypt respectively Japan as well as into the potentialities of their creative re-consideration. In the *Conclusion*, a brief comparative approach is pursued which brings into the spotlight the necessity of reinvigorating the classics through the prism of the cultural consumption industry. Furthermore, some inquiries into the future of such performances are rhetorically addressed with the intent to revive the curiosity of both producers and consumers of live performances, regardless of representational medium. Based on more than two decades of on-site fieldwork comprised of extensive phenomenological experiences and detailed empiric inquiries with both producers and consumers of Japanese popular culture and, distinctively, of Takarazuka Revue's releases as well as comprehensive archival literature research, this paper aims at hermeneutically elucidating the two performances' mechanisms of confronting audiences with uncomfortable historical reconstructions while offering credible visions of a future based on universal values of (healthy) self-love, compassion and mutual respect: the very fact that these values are taken for granted by late-modern social participants leads to them being jeopardized in populist discourses on "the greater good", "pastoral premodernity", "technological evil". Therefore, raising awareness of their historical perishability functions as a sustainable counter-force to current global efforts employed in the dissolution of modernity and its accomplishments towards their replacement with new forms of autocracy, totalitarianism and oppression. As to be shown further below, both *Aida* and *A Song for Kingdoms* tap into the humans' emotional turmoils since time immemorial and reveal within similar dramaturgic logic and architectural

[3] Since 1919, the exclusive, very competitive two-years Takarazuka Music School (宝塚音楽学校 *Takarazuka Ongaku Gakkô*) delivers yearly 40 (female) graduates who join the team of ca. 350 actresses performing on Takarazuka Revue's stage. Similarly to Takarazuka Revue (Company), Takarazuka Music School changed its official denomination several times since its inception. The current name dates back to 1946.

design, two different ways to cope with life's challenges: peaceful acceptance of the inevitable and/or hopeful vision of a better future.

2. The universalization of music and emotions: Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* (1871)

World-premiered in Cairo on Christmas Eve (24. December) of 1871 at Khedivial Opera House,[4] which had also commissioned its mise-en-scène, in a performance led by the Italian Romantic composer, conductor and double-bass virtuoso Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889), *Aida* (or *Aïda*) is a tragic opera in four acts composed by the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) on a libretto in the Italian language by the Italian journalist, poet and novelist Antonio Ghislanzoni (1824-1893). Set in the Old Kingdom of Egypt, the work has been holding ever since a central place in the operatic canon, receiving several performances every year around the world; e.g., at New York's Metropolitan Opera alone, *Aida* has been staged more than 1,200 times since 1886 (Parker, 1998; Parker, 2007).[5] Ghislanzoni's plot scheme follows a scenario often attributed to the French Egyptologist August Mariette (1821-1881), a fact contested by Verdi biographer Mary Jane Phillips-Marz who argues that the actual source was the Italian opera composer and librettist Temistocle Solera (1815-1878; Budden, 1984; Loewenberg, 1978).

Isma'il Pasha (1830-1895), also known as Ismail the Magnificent, the Khedive ('viceroy') of Egypt and ruler of Sudan from 1863 to 1879, when he was removed at the behest of Great Britain and France, who had greatly modernized Egypt and Sudan during his reign investing heavily in industrial and economic development, urbanization and the expansion of the

---

[4] The Khedivial Opera House or Royal Opera House was an opera house in Cairo, Egypt, the oldest opera house in entire Africa. It was inaugurated on 1. November 1869 and it burned down on 28. October 1971. It was built on the orders of the Isma'il Pasha, the Khedive (viceroy) at the time, to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal, by commissioning the Italian architect Pietro Avoscani (1816-1891) to design the building. It seated approximately 850 people and was made mostly of wood. Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* was the first opera performed at the opera house on 1. November 1869 instead of the grander exhibition planned by Isma'il for the opening, which included the world-premiere of Verdi's new opera *Aida* set in the Old Kingdom of Egypt and commissioned for this very particular occasion, but after months of delay due to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, the Khedivial Opera House opened with *Rigoletto* and *Aida* received its world-premiere on its stage on 24. December 1871. In the early morning hours of 28. October 1971, the opera house burned to the ground, with only two statues made by Mohamed Hassan (1892-1961) surviving (De Van, 1998, 68). After the original opera house was destroyed, Cairo did not have an opera house for nearly two decades until the opening of the new Cairo Opera House in 1988. The site of the Khedivial Opera House has been rebuilt into a multi-story concrete car garage. The square (to the south of Al Ataba metro station) overlooking the building's location is still called Opera Square (Meidan El Opera; see Kimbell and Holden, 2001).

[5] Throughout the decades, several popular adaptations for larger audiences emerged: e.g., the 1952 Broadway musical *My Darlin' Aida*, set on a plantation in Tennessee in the first year of the American Civil War, is based on the opera and uses Verdi's music with lyrics by Charles Friedman; the 1953 Italian movie version which starred Lois Maxwell as Amneris and Sophia Loren as Aida, and the 1987 Swedish production: in both cases, the lead actors lip-synched to recordings by actual opera singers. In the case of the 1953 movie, Ebe Stignani sang as Amneris and Renata Tebaldi sang as Aida. The opera's story, but not its music, was used as the basis for a 1998 eponymous musical with music by Elton John on lyrics by Tim Rice. Moreover, the opera has been portrayed in the 2001 Italian musical adventure fantasy animated movie *Aida of the Trees* (*Aida degli alberi*) written and directed by Guido Manuli on a soudtrack by Ennio Morricone: the characters are seen as anthropomorphic creatures between the fictional kingdoms of Alborea and Petra as the star-crossed lovers must find a way to unify their worlds while facing off against the evil high priest Ramfis (Parker, 1998, Parker, 2007).

country's geographical borders in Africa, commissioned Verdi to write an opera to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal and the inauguration of the Khedivial Opera House or Royal Opera House on 1. November 1869, which Verdi declined. Eventually, he agreed for a hefty honorary (Phillips-Matz, 1993, p. 121). However, because the scenery and costumes were stuck for months in the French capital during the Siege of Paris (1870-1871) of the ongoing Franco-Prussian War, the premiere was delayed and Verdi's *Rigoletto* was performed instead for the official inauguration, with *Aida* being finally world-premiered on 24. December 1871 (Pistone, 1995, p. 73). *Aida* met with great acclaim: the costumes and accessories for the world-premiere were designed by August Mariette, who also oversaw the design and construction of the sets, which were made in Paris by the Paris Opéra's stage painters Auguste-Alfred Rubé and Philippe Chaperon (acts 1 and 4) and Édouard Desplechin and Jean-Baptiste Lavastre (acts 2 and 3), all of them famous specialists of their time, and shipped to Cairo (Pistone, 1995, p. 82; Simon, 1946; Toye, 1931). The Italian (and European) premiere followed at La Scala in Milan on 8. February 1872, and involved Verdi heavily at every phase of the production (Martin, 1963, p. 59; Phillips-Matz, 1993, p. 21; Pistone, 1995, p. 154).

Throughout the four acts, *Aida* follows the intertwined destinies of several main characters whose vocal distribution follow the prevailing conventions of the time in their *a priori* depiction: Aida, an Ethiopian princess (soprano), Radames, captain of the guard (tenor), Amneris, daughter of the Pharaoh (mezzo-soprano or alto), the Pharaoh of Egypt (bass), Amonasro, king of Ethiopia (baritone). The libretto does not mention a precise time period, so it is difficult to place the opera more specifically than the Old Kingdom (ca. 2700-2200 BC). For the first production, Mariette went to great efforts to make the sets and costumes authentic. Taking into consideration the consistent artistic styles throughout the 3000-year history of ancient Egypt, a given production does not particularly need to choose an exact time period within the larger frame of ancient Egyptian history. The back-story of the synopsis reveals that the Egyptians have captured and enslaved Aida, an Ethiopian princess, with whom an Egyptian military commander, Radames, is deeply in love; therefore, he struggles to choose between his emotions towards her and his loyalty to the Pharaoh, the King of Egypt. To additionally complicate the narrative line, the Pharaoh's daughter Amneris is in love with Radames, although he does not return her feelings.

The opera starts with Ramfis, the high priest of Egypt, telling Radames, the young warrior, that war with the Ethiopians seems inevitable, and Radames expresses his hopes that he will be chosen as the Egyptian commander. Radames dreams both of gaining victory on the battlefield and of Aida, an Ethiopian slave, with whom he is secretly in love. Aida, who is also secretly in love with Radames, is the captured daughter of the Ethiopian king Amonasro, but her Egyptian captors are unaware of her true identity. Her father has invaded Egypt to deliver her from servitude. Amneris, the daughter of the Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, who also loves Radames but fears that his heart belongs to someone else, enters the hall. When Aida appears and Radames seems disturbed by her presence, Amneris starts to suspect that Aida could be her rival, but is able to hide her jealousy and approach Aida. Alone in the hall, Aida feels torn between her love for her father, her country, and Radames. The second act starts with dances and music to celebrate Radames' victory: Amneris is still in doubt about Radames' love and wonders whether Aida is in love with him, but she tries to forget her doubt, entertaining her worried heart with the dance of Moorish slaves. When Aida enters the chamber, Amneris asks everyone to leave. By falsely telling Aida that Radames has died in the battle, she tricks her

into professing her love for him. In grief, and shocked by the news, Aida confesses that her heart belongs to Radames eternally. This confession fires Amneris with rage, and she plans on taking revenge on Aida, while Radames returns victorious and the troops march into the city. The Pharaoh decrees that on this day the triumphant Radames may have anything he wishes. Claiming the reward promised by the Pharaoh, Radames pleads with him to spare the lives of the prisoners and to set them free. The king grants Radames' wish, and declares that he (Radames) will be his (the Pharaoh's) successor and will marry his daughter (Amneris). At Ramfis' suggestion to the Pharaoh, Aida, Amonasro and other hostages are kept in Egypt to ensure that the Ethiopians do not avenge their defeat.

The third act begins with public prayers on the eve of Amneris and Radames' wedding in the Temple of Isis. Outside the temple, Aida waits to meet with Radames as they had planned, but Amonasro appears and orders Aida to find out the location of the Egyptian army from Radames. Aida, torn between her love for Radames and her loyalty to her native land and to her father, reluctantly agrees and when Radames arrives, Amonasro hides behind a rock and listens to their conversation. Radames affirms that he will marry Aida and Aida convinces him to flee to the desert with her; when Radames makes further plans, he inadvertently discloses the location where his army has chosen to attack. Upon hearing this, Amonasro comes out of hiding and reveals his identity, which leads to Radames realizing, to his extreme dismay, that he has unwittingly revealed a crucial military secret to the enemy. At the same time, Amneris and Ramfis leave the temple and, seeing Radames in conference with the enemy, call for the imperial guards. Amonasro draws a dagger, intending to kill Amneris and Ramfis before the guards can hear them, but Radames disarms him, quickly orders him to flee with Aida, and surrenders himself to the imperial guards as Aida and Amonasro run off. The guards arrest him as a traitor. The fourth act sets off with Amneris desires to save Radames by asking him to deny the accusations, but Radames, who does not wish to live without Aida, refuses. He is relieved to know Aida is still alive and hopes she has reached her own country. Off-stage, Ramfis recites the charges against Radames and calls on him to defend himself, but he stands mute, and is condemned to death as a traitor. Amneris, who remains on-stage, protests that Radames is innocent, and pleads with the priests to show mercy, but the priests sentence him to be buried alive; Amneris weeps and curses the priests as he is taken away. Radames has been brought into the lower floor of the temple and sealed up in a dark vault, where he thinks that he is alone. As he expresses his hopes that Aida is in a safer place, he hears a sigh and then sees Aida. She has hidden herself in the vault in order to die with Radames. They accept their terrible fate and bid farewell to Earth and its sorrows. Above the vault in the temple of Ptah, Amneris weeps and prays to the goddess Isis. In the vault below, Aida dies in Radames' arms as the priests, off-stage, pray to the god Ptah.

While heavy in orientalist elements submitting to the highly romanticized vision of non-European cultures with the simultaneous attempt to faithfully reproduce the respective era in visual and musical rendition, *Aida* brings into the foreground the inescapable internal struggles of the protagonists on the background of unforgiving historical circumstances. The focus lies on the characters' construction and their relatable, emotionally charged manifestation on-stage so that audiences can experience katharsis as the *sine qua non* goal of artistic representations, regardless of medium. By tapping into the universality of human emotions with their raw expression in moments of uncontrollability and their transcendence in the face of all-encompassing death, *Aida* allows for the transition towards more realist depiction of the

human nature on-stage, which would come to full fruition in the first half of the 20th century. Like in classical tragedies, *Aida* is a stark reminder until today of the all-consuming supremacy of emotions despite centuries of Renaissance-driven Enlightenment and the apparent domination of rationality.

3. Pacifist ideologies: Takarazuka Revue's *A Song for Kingdoms*

When it was world-premiered in 2003, *A Song for Kingdoms* reflected the turmoils of the time: economically, Japan was still recovering from the "lost decade" while trying to cope with the global realities of the early 21st century. Politically, and probably most relevantly, the year 2003 promised to be(come) a difficult turning-point for Japan as political tensions had arisen due to the US pressure to send segments of the "self-defense [military] forces" 自衛隊 overseas in support of the UN military missions in Iraq, increasingly dividing a population famously regarded by outsiders and perceived by itself as a reputed monolith (Benesch, 2014; Sugimoto, 2013). The public debate, energetically fueled by mass-media on all levels, ended with the victory of those few vigorously promoting the deployment of Japanese troops to Iraq – which were officially promised on 9. December 2003 by then-prime minister Koizumi Jun'ichirô 小泉純一郎 "for reconstruction efforts" – and despite the overwhelming opposition of a vast majority of the population throughout the nationally negotiated process of reinterpreting the postwar constitution to employ the *jieitai* 自衛隊 exclusively for "self-defense", as the denomination itself asserts. On the other hand, Japanese everyday culture had started to be increasingly appreciated internationally, with repeated waves of Soft Power affecting gradually larger segments of the global population, specifically in wealthy nations alongside the entire socioeconomic spectrum.

Staged at Takarazuka Grand Theater in Takarazuka from 11. July 2003 until 18. August 2003 and at Tokyo Takarazuka Theater in Japan's capital from 19. September 2003 until 3. November 2003, star troupe's *A Song for Kingdoms* takes over the political upheaval of the stress-ratio between the past and the future and their efficient reflection in the present while bringing into the spotlight the phenomenon of war as a calamity to be kept at bay in the character of Radames, the young officer in the Egyptian army. Based on Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida* from 1871, the plot-line was adapted by the experienced Takarazuka Revue's in-house director Kimura Shinji 木村 信司 (Kawasaki, 2005, p. 99). Star troupe's topstar-*otokoyaku* Kozuki Wataru 湖月 わたる, one of the cult-*otokoyaku* in recent decades, delivered a Radames' warrior figure keen on peace, fully aware that wars bring only misery and loss of human lives. In tune with star troupe's public image, 2003's *A Song for Kingdoms*'s almost obtrusive appeal to preserve peace at any cost and to avoid war was at the time clearly politically motivated (Hashimoto, 1999, pp. 43-51; Hori, 2018, p. 96; Robertson 1998 p. 84; Nehring, 1997, p. 64; Sakai, 2022, p. 153).[6] Indeed, star troupe (星組 *hoshi-gumi*), which was founded in 1933, the same year as the

[6] Apart from star troupe and cosmos troupe discussed in this paper, there are three further troupes actively staging within Takarazuka Revue Company, each with its specific public image: Flower troupe 花組 was formed in 1921 and is largely perceived as the most treasured of the five ensembles, with larger budgets and more lavish stage and costume designs as well as more powerful and impactful performances. Founded in the same year as flower troupe, 1921, moon troupe 月組 was mainly the one to push forward the performance strategy when it

original Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre was inaugurated, but was banned from performing between 1939 and 1946, is famous for casting strong, charismatic *otokoyaku* performers (such as Wataru Kozuki 2003-2006 and Reon Yuzuki 2009-2015) in impactful performances with memorable messages thus, the 2003 version focused intensely on the romantic trio between Radames, Amneris, the Pharaoh's daughter enacted by topstar-*musumeyaku* Dan Rei 檀 れい, and Aida, the Ethiopian slave eventually revealed to be the princess of Ethiopia, embodied by secondary-topstar *otokoyaku* Aran Kei 安蘭けい: therefore, the human drama is highlighted rather than the phenomenon of war itself which inconspicuously slides into the background. Like Verdi's *Aida*, *A Song for Kingdoms* transcends its political message into a human tragedy with its universal motifs of betrayal, star-crossed lovers and ultimate sacrifice.

When *A Song for Kingdoms* was re-staged in 2015 (from 5. June 2015 until 13. July 2015 at Takarazuka Grand Theater in Takarazuka and from 31. July 2015 until 30. August 2015 at Tokyo Takarazuka Theater) by cosmos troupe (宙組 *sora-gumi*) – grounded in 1998 and associated with progressive plots, often conveying pilot-projects in attempts to test audiences' boundaries –, the war-related dimension of the performance's message changed radically though subtly, from the imperative commandment to preserve and protect peace in the name of the human right to a life of dignity in freedom to the open acknowledgment that war might be at times necessary for restoring peace (Eagleton, 2003). Radames was enacted by topstar-*otokoyaku* Asaka Manato 朝夏 まなと who generally portrayed warm-hearted masculine characters, so that her version of Radames emanated a sense of compassion and vulnerability, and in combination with topstar-*musumeyaku* Misaki Rion's 実咲 凛音 Aida, the focus shifted towards the impossible choices leaders have to face and the heavy responsibilities which come with their privileged position: While war cannot be avoided, good leaders can make it short and less destructive.

Perhaps the most indicative of this focus on war and peace rather than the human love triangle is *A Song for Kingdoms*' main song 'The World I Am Dreaming of' or "My Request to the World" (「世界に求む」 *Sekai ni motomu*) at the end of the performance in both versions: buried alive as the capital punishment for his apparent betrayal which had led to Pharaoh's assassination by Aida's brother and his acolytes despite Amneris' one-sided love towards him and despair to save him, Radames finds Aida in the tomb's darkness, who has decided to follow him in the netherworld. Together, they pray for peace and understanding among

---

staged the world premieres of *Mon Paris* (『モン・パリ：和が巴里よ』, 1927), *The Rose of Versailles* (『ベルサイユのばら』, 1974) and *Gone with the Wind* (『風と共に去りぬ』, 1977). Unlike flower troupe, which is largely perceived as the most treasured of the five ensembles, with larger budgets and more lavish stage and costume designs as well as more powerful and impactful performances, moon troupe pays meticulous attention to group performances and in particular to energetic expression in chorus singing as well as numerous adaptations from Western sources. Inaugurated in 1924, simultaneously with the opening of the first Takarazuka Grand Theatre, snow troupe 雪組 is considered the upholder of traditional dance and opera for the whole company and has the slight reputation of being the vanguard of classical Japanese drama; when it takes over Western material, such as Japan premiere in 1996 the 1992's Vienna-original musical *Elisabeth: The Rondo of Love and Death* 『エリザベート：愛と死の輪舞（ロンド）』, which would turn into one of Takarazuka Revue's long-term blockbusters, it adds symbolical underpinnings, with 'appropriation' and 'Japanisation' being among the main preoccupations and/or insinuations (Hashimoto, 1999, 43-51, Hori, 2018, 96, Robertson 1998: 84; see Nehring, 1997, 64; Sakai, 2022, 153).

humans, even though this might seem impossible in the moment, as a ray of hope for the future (Fromm, 1956; Giddens, 1993; Kristeva, 1989). Two elements seem important in this approach to manifesting peace in the world: firstly, the idea of mutual forgiveness; secondly, the concept of individual responsibility as individual choices we are facing continuously. Hence, on the one hand, it appears crucial to learn to move on from past grievances and to let go of things one cannot control – in this case, the fact that neither Radames nor Aida cannot bring forth any amendments to the fact that they are deemed to die a gruesome death even if they did their best to live a moral life and were betrayed by those they have trusted the most intimately (Bauman, 2003; Anderson, 1988). On the other hand, each of them is painfully aware that they could have made different decisions which would, most probably, have led to a different outcome than their current ordeal: Aida could have not given in to her father's pressure to pull state secrets out of Radames and Radames himself could have simply followed the Pharaoh's and Amneris' requests to enter their family through marriage and give up his dreams of a peaceful togetherness with enemy states. Nonetheless, the past is not something to ponder upon. By moving together into death, their only hope is that future generations will learn the lesson so that their sacrifice is not in vain.

この世に平和を！	Peace in the world!
この地上に輝きを	Light on earth!
人みな　あふれる太陽あび	May the overflowing sun give us smiles
微笑んで暮らせるように！	So that we can keep on living.
戦いに終わりを！	May the fighting end!
この地上に喜びを	Joy on earth!
人みな　ひとしく認めあって	We recognize each other as equals
お互いを許せるように！	And can forgive each other.
たとえ今は	Even if this seems now like a dream
夢のように思えても	I put my life on line
この身を捧げて	That such a world
そんな世界をいつかきっと！	Will certainly exist in the future.
祈ろう明日を	Let's pray for tomorrow!
この地上にこそ希望を	Let's pray for hope on earth!
人みな　時代から時代へと	Everyone across times,
誇らしく語れるように！	So that we can talk with pride about it!
そんな世界を私は求めてゆく！	I am yearning for such a world!

そんな世界を私は求めてゆく！ I am yearning for such a world!

Interestingly, in Takarazuka Revue's version, Amneris' promise on the surface of the tomb that there will be no war anymore so that nobody experience her pain in losing someone dear, is a subtle shift from Giuseppe Verdi's opera, in which Amneris simply decries Radames' death and prays to the goddess Isis on the background of the priests' chorus who, offstage, pray to the god Ptah ("Immenso Ftha" or "Almighty Ptah"). Thus, while Verdi's and Ghislanzoni's opera *Aida* is a tragedy in classical tradition with a direct sense of catharsis to be extracted form events on-stage which would subsequently deliver to audiences the direction of their educational redemption (Martin, 1963, p. 128; Phillips-Matz, 1993, p. 185), Takarazuka Revue's *A Song for Kingdoms* complies with prevailing conventions in products of popular culture and promptly showcases the course of significance and understanding to consumers. In *Aida*, death is the ultimate end, the final outcome of specific decisions taken by individuals and their concatenation in a clearly defined framework. In *A Song for Kingdoms*, death contains the hope of lessons to be conveyed to future generations by a single choice made by an individual in the aftermath of the tragedy: Amneris' vow to end war and to think of the world yet to come instead of pursuing revenge and therefore perpetuating meaningless suffering. Nonetheless, the replacement of the first line of 2003's title song "Peace in the world!" (「この世に平和を！」) with 2015's "To those we love" (「愛する人よ！」), otherwise identical, and of the word "peace" (平和 *heiwa*) with "tomorrow" (明日 *ashita*) in Amneris' final interjection, underscores the discreet yet profound shift from a peace-oriented mindset towards a victory-driven vision of the future.

The employment of cosmos troupe brought firmly to light 2015's version of *A Song for Kingdoms* as revolutionary in its approach to war and more particularly in highlighting Takarazuka Revue's re-calibrating asymmetries towards the representation of war since 1945: from absolute pacifism towards geopolitical pragmatism. Usually associated with a non-conformist allure, breaking prevailing standards in Takarazuka Revue's tradition, the engagement of cosmos troupe strikes in audiences' perception a chord of experimental, explorative exuberance. Founded in 1998, the cosmos troupe is the youngest among the five ensembles of the Takarazuka Revue Company; in comparison to other troupes, the cosmos troupe is regarded as less bound to any sort of image Takarazuka Revue – as a socio-economic or cultural phenomenon – might have established. Thus, cosmos troupe's restaging of such an equivocal performance as *A Song for Kingdoms* suggests Takarazuka Revue's administrators' self-awareness of its fundamental role in conveying specific messages to – and therefore, discreetly, educating – its (primarily) Japanese (primarily) female audiences in relation to the future and its fallacies as well as to their roles as mothers and wives in building up that very future. Like in the initial 2003 version, Radames believes in peace, in political stability and economic prosperity resulting from peace, and promotes it open-heartedly (Yamanashi 2012, p. 151; Iwahori 1972). Nevertheless, Aida's inadvertent betrayal is less motivated by patriotism and rather by the yearning for love and emotional fulfilment, as is Amneris' final nemesis, when she pledges to care for the future not so much out of concern for the population she is in charge with after her father's assassination, but due to the immense pain she must endure when confronting with Radames' involuntary act of treason and his consequent sentencing to death penalty. Once again, there are human destinies underlying impossible choices and as

such reflecting the conflicting loyalties of average citizens in the here-and-now of the Japanese everyday realities, paving the pathway, in the long run, towards a slightly updated alternative to Takarazuka Revue's founder Kobayashi Ichizô's (小林一三, 1873–1957) ideal of it being a theater for the average people and representing them, their dreams and their longings (Kobayashi 1955, p. 36-41; Kawasaki 1999): empowered by cosmos troupe's symbolical position as the carrier of Takarazuka Revue's most progressive contents, the theatrical medium 'Takarazuka Revue' turns once again into an instrument of reflecting, promoting, propagating, implementing, and therefore providing alternative role-models and existential paradigms to audiences within the neo-liberal undercurrents crisscrossing Japan's public discourse by mid-2010s – (in)famous for its increasingly conservative tendencies (Leheny, 2018, p. 121). While 2003's *A Song for Kingdoms* brought forth characters with almost mythological valences, turning increasingly into archetypes and clearly distancing themselves from the warmth, familiarity, memorability, relatability as well as shared humanity which distinguish regular *dramatis personae* on Takarazuka Revue's stage, 2015's *A Song for Kingdoms* metamorphosed them back into classical heroes and heroines, with whom audiences can easily identify in their – individual – quest for fulfilment, validation and empathic resonance. This appears as a bold move in an era of low-key progression towards conservative reformulations of history focused on collectivist leveling, motivated by economic-political endeavors.

More than any performance of the year 2015 but building upon Takarazuka Revue's public image of flamboyant orchestrations of collective cooperation and corporate excellence stemming from individual commitment, hard-work and perseverence,[7] *A Song for Kingdoms* lays the subliminal premises for the *wakon wasai* (和魂和才, 'Japanese spirit/roots, Japanese technology/knowledge') strategy, with friendship 友愛 and kindness 優しさ as core parameters of a new paradigm of humanity, which transcends the (Western) modernity project, emulated by Meiji technocrats into the *wakon yôsai* (和魂洋才, 'Japanese spirit/roots, Western technology/knowledge') slogan, which in its turn had been the mid-19th century version of the premodern *wakon kansai* (和魂漢才, 'Japanese spirit/roots, Chinese technology/knowledge'; (Mason & Caiger, 1979, p. 236; McClain, 2002, p. 138; Howland, 2001; Havens, 1970). Nonetheless, unlike the (Western) modernity project, based on efficiency and competitiveness and prioritizing economic growth and technological progress over political stability and social cohesion, the Japanese solution brings into foreground cooperation and compassion as sociocultural parameters, compounded by integrity and harmony as tools to attain and keep peace, both within nations and, more importantly, among nations. 2003's

[7] The year 2015 was an important year in Takarazuka Revue's more-than-centennial history, with three out of the yearly nine performances orchestrating major paradigm shifts in its representation strategy, after 2014's lavish celebrations of its centennial history. The first such pivotal performance was *1789: The Lovers of Bastille* (『1789：バスティユーの恋人たち』, moon troupe), the Japanese adaption of the French rock-opera *1789: Les Amants de la Bastille*, world-premiered in 2012 at Palais des sports de Paris, which manifests a decisive U-turn from the blockbuster *The Rose of Versailles* (1974) which had determined Takarazuka Revue's public image – and self-orchestration – as a fundamental part of the *shôjo* culture since mid-1970s. The second performance was *A Song for Kingdoms*. The third performance was *The Night When the Stars Met* (『星逢一夜』, snow troupe): it is an essential deconstruction of the Edo rhetoric and the *bushidô* (武士道, "the way of the warrior/samurai") ideology presented as deeply toxic through the focus on a star-crossed love story on the tragic background of three children's friendship.

A Song for Kingdoms clung to past premises of unconditional pacificism regardless of historical realities and geographically motivated tensions. 2015's *A Song for Kingdoms* suggested a more pragmatic approach to present-day challenges implying the proactive involvement into real-time history and, thus, a (more) resolute position on the political spectrum within the global community. This advocacy for a clear stance in international politics originates in the obvious necessity to confront one's own past and to address national traumas as part of a healing journey postponed for long decades – with the very decisive farewell from repressing historical responsibility and the self-aware involvement in the present.

4. Conclusion: late-modern challenges to global ideals

Giusepe Verdi's *Aida* corresponded to the orientalist, romanticized vision of non-European cultures prevalent at the time of its premieres both in Egypt and in Milan: by depicting the raw unraveling of human emotions on-stage, it possibly created a subliminal sense of familiarity between times and spaces, on the one hand, and it opened the pathway towards a more realist expression of characters by artistic means, on the other hand. The love triangle served as the premise for the plot development and its tragic denouement aimed at mediating cathartic experiences while preserving the canon of live representation. Takarazuka Revue's *A Song for Kingdoms* moves beyond the human tragedy into the realm of universal yearnings and employs the display of human emotions as the foundation for historical events which transcend the limitations of individual existence. Aida, Radames or Amneris are far more than simple characters involved in their all-too-common mechanisms of unrequited respectively forbidden love: they slowly metamorphose into human archetypes on their way towards absolution with precise functions within the convulsions of history. Eventually, Radames' uncompromising attitude leads him to inspiring Amneris to envision a world of peace while Aida willingly joins him in death. This is not a tragedy anymore; this is a human drama with three individuals making very distinct choices, fully self-aware of the consequences of those very choices and diligently taking responsibility for them. In Verdi's and Ghislanzoni's *Aida*, humans were victims of their surroundings, and the tragedy resulted from the obligation to submit to circumstances over which one had no control whatsoever. In Takarazuka Revue's *A Song for Kingdoms*, humans are faced with impossible choices, but they make them nonetheless and then stand behind them: war – or peace – are simply consequences of one's decisions, not random events of history. Ultimately, regardless of how hopeless any situation might appear, there are lesson to be learnt and new trajectories for the future to be drawn.

Interestingly, Takarazuka Revue's *A Song for Kingdoms* pushes forward the ideology of peace as the goal of the entire humankind. The 2003 version orchestrated it as an absolute truth; the 2015 version elaborated it into a further precondition of our survival as a species, but underscored at the same time the importance of peace as a conscious decision, not as a state imposed by means of authority and power – which would transform it into yet another form of evil, oppression, dictatorial hegemony. Peace as a phenomenon as well as peace as an understanding of the world stems from peace as an individual choice in the midst of the multitude of existential choices made on a daily basis. It is in this form of self-aware peace that, potentially, collective and even planetary peace can be achieved: towards a genuinely enlightened species which has come to terms with its own mortality, fallibility and ephemerality while paying its own tributes to the universality of cosmic returns. One might argue, indeed,

that Takarazuka Revue's version of *Aida* transcends its orientalism into a millennial *memento* of humanity's attempts to conceptualize itself as part of a greater whole, with peace and war simply being two further elements on the canvas of historical determinism.

References

Verdi, G. (1870–1871). *Aïda*. IMSLP: International Music Score Library Project. Retrieved December 15, 2024, from https://imslp.org/wiki/Aida_(Verdi,_Giuseppe)

Verdi, G., & Ghislanzoni, A. (n.d.). *Aïda: An opera in four acts*. Retrieved December 15, 2024, from https://archive.org/details/adaoperainfourac00verd

Takarazuka Kagekidan. (2003a). *Ôke ni Sasagu Uta [A Song for Kingdoms]* [Performance program]. Takarazuka Kagekidan.

Takarazuka Kagekidan. (2003b). *Ôke ni Sasagu Uta [A Song for Kingdoms]* [DVD]. Takarazuka Kagekidan.

Takarazuka Kagekidan. (2015a). *Ôke ni Sasagu Uta [A Song for Kingdoms]* [Performance program]. Takarazuka Kagekidan.

Takarazuka Kagekidan. (2015b). *Ôke ni Sasagu Uta [A Song for Kingdoms]* [DVD]. Takarazuka Kagekidan.

Allison, A. (2013). *Precarious Japan*. Duke University Press.

Anderson, P. (1988). *The origins of postmodernity*. Verso Press.

Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid love*. Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted lives*. Polity Press.

Benesch, O. (2014). *Inventing the way of the samurai*. Oxford University Press.

Bhabha, H. (2004). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Budden, J. (1984). *The operas of Verdi*. Cassell Publishers.

Castells, M. (1998). *The information age, economy, society and culture III: End of millennium*. Blackwell Publishers.

Dalio, R. (2021). *The changing world order*. Simon & Schuster Publishers.

De Van, G. (1998). *Verdi's theater* (G. Roberts, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Eagleton, T. (2003). *After theory*. Basic Books.

Fromm, E. (1956). *The art of loving*. Harper & Row Publishers.

Giddens, A. (1993). *The transformation of intimacy*. Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (2020). *The third way*. Polity Press.

Hashimoto, M. (1999). *Subarashii Takarazuka Kageki [The Wonderful Takarazuka Revue]*. Takarazuka Kagekidan.

Havens, T. R. H. (1970). *Nishi Amane and modern Japanese thought*. Princeton University Press.

Hori, H. (2018). *Promiscuous media*. Cornell University Press.

Howland, D. (2001). Translating liberty in nineteenth-century Japan. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 62*(1), 161–181.

Iwahori, Y. (1972). *Isai Kobayashi Ichizô no Shôhô [The Specific Business Strategy of the Genial Kobayashi Ichizô]*. Hyôgensha.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual poachers*. Routledge.

Kawasaki, K. (1999). *Takarazuka, shôhi shakai no supekutakuru [Takarazuka, the spectacle of the consumption society]*. Kôdansha.

Kawasaki, K. (2005). *Takarazuka to iu Yûtopia [The utopia named Takarazuka]*. Iwanami.

Kobayashi, I. (1955). *Takarazuka manpitsu [Takarazuka miscellanea]*. Jitsugyô no Nihonsha.

Leheny, D. (2018). *Empire of hope*. Cornell University Press.

Kimbell, D., & Holden, A. (Eds.). (2001). *The New Penguin opera guide*. Penguin Putnam Publishers.

Kristeva, J. (1989). *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*. Éditions Fayard.

Loewenberg, A. (1978). *Annals of opera 1597–1940*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Martin, G. W. (1963). *Verdi, his music, life and times*. Dodd, Mead and Company.
Mason, R. H. P., & Caiger, J. G. (1979). *A history of Japan*. Tuttle Press.
McClain, J. L. (2002). *Japan, a modern history*. W. W. Norton Publishers.
Miegel, M. (2007). *Epochenwende*. Ullstein Verlag.
Nehring, N. (1997). *Popular music, gender, and postmodernism*. Sage Publishers.
Parker, R. (1998). Aida. In S. Stanley (Ed.), *The New Grove dictionary of opera* (Vol. I). Macmillan Publishers.
Parker, R. (2007). *The New Grove guide to Verdi and his operas*. Oxford University Press.
Phillips-Matz, M. J. (1993). *Verdi, a biography*. Oxford University Press.
Pistone, D. (1995). *Nineteenth-century Italian opera: From Rossini to Puccini*. Amadeus Press.
Robertson, J. E. (1998). *Takarazuka*. University of California Press.
Sakai, N. (2022). *The end of Pax Americana*. Duke University Press.
Simon, H. W. (1946). *A treasury of grand opera*. Simon & Schuster Publishers.
Stickland, L. (2008). *Gender gymnastics*. Trans Pacific Press.
Sugimoto, Y. (2013). *An introduction to Japanese society*. Cambridge University Press.
Toye, F. (1931). *Giuseppe Verdi, his life and work*. Knopf Press.
Tsuganesawa, T. (1991). *Takarazuka Kageki senryaku [The Takarazuka Revue strategy]*. Kôdansha.
Uchino, T. (2009). *Crucible bodies*. Seagull Press.
Watanabe, H. (1999). *Takarazuka Kageki no hen'yô to Nihon kindai [Takarazuka Revue's transformation and Japanese modernity]*. Shinshokan.
Watanabe, H. (2002). *Nihon-bunka modan rapusodî [Japanese culture, a modern rhapsody]*. Shunjûsha.
Yamanashi, M. (2012). *A history of Takarazuka Revue since 1914*. Brill Publishers.