

The Takarazuka revue: Creating the perfect man

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**STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY/
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

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Signed: 

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Abstract

The Takarazuka revue is an esteemed all-female theatre ensemble birthed in the town of Takarazuka, Japan. Initially a small troupe founded by Kobayashi Ichizo, a visionary entrepreneur with an ardent passion for live performance. Established approximately 111 years ago at the time of writing this. The group's humble beginnings quickly grew into a phenomenally successful and renowned institution with a dedicated cult following. Despite the troupe's success, few people in the West have been involved in their discourse.

This thesis will examine and appreciate the collaborative efforts of the scenographers, designers, and actors involved in the meticulous process of creating the otokoyaku. Especially the mutually beneficial relationship designers and actors have, augmenting each other's strengths. This thesis's primary focus is on the otokoyaku, male role specialists within the revue. It inquires how the combination of makeup and costume intensifies an actor's performance. And why does that contribute to creating the appealing persona of the otokoyaku? This thesis structure will be comprised of three chapters, chapter one will be dedicated to the power of makeup, chapter two hails costume design and chapter three examines the nuances of body language displayed during a live performance.

Key words: Takarazuka, Otokoyaku

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Introduction

The beauty of theatre has been alive for many generations. This treasured art form is an incredibly cherished outlet and a rich example of a beloved form of performance is kabuki theatre. Kabuki was founded in the late 17th century and grew in popularity due to its distinctive style, that being featuring exclusively men (“UNESCO - Kabuki Theatre”). Originating in Japan, kabuki theatre is highly praised and widely known, even to people in the West. In contrast to kabuki theatre, the Takarazuka revue, an all-female theatre troupe is relatively obscure to people in the Western Hemisphere, even though it adheres to an exclusive framework like kabuki.

To begin, this thesis will briefly provide context as to who the Takarazuka revue are, as contextualisation is imperative to understanding the history and significance of the troupe before investigating the performative mechanics of makeup, costume and acting which this thesis will detail in depth. The Takarazuka revue started as a small theatre troupe in Japan. It was established in 1914 by Kobayashi Ichizo, a railway tycoon in Japan during the Taisho period (c.1912 – c.1926); a period known for the rapid development of technology and a growing rift between traditionalism and modernism, which ultimately influenced the trajectory of the Takarazuka revue (Takarazuka Revue official website).

Initially, Kobayashi’s aspirations did not encompass creating the Takarazuka revue, he was focused on fostering business in the quaint town of Takarazuka by building hotels and railway stations. After a setback in building a hot springs attraction in the hope of bringing more visitors to the town, Kobayashi

decided that all was not lost. Kobayashi had to shift his vision and repurpose his entrepreneurial endeavors. As a result, he turned to his love for the arts.

Kobayashi established a small performance on top of a sealed swimming pool involving a group of young rookie actors, an all-female group of actors (Takarazuka Revue official website). This was a significant milestone in history as Kobayashi was one of the first men to give women a chance to re-enter theatre in Japan.

Kobayashi deeply cared for the arts and its preservation but also saw an opportunity for a new trade. It is no surprise that Kobayashi, as an entrepreneur, turned this incident into a legacy that transformed the Japanese theatrical scene. (Takarazuka Revue official website). However, it is important to recognise that although this action could be interpreted as a feminist move, Kobayashi was quite conservative in his way of thinking. He saw the revue as a business opportunity and not as a chance to give women freedom in a world that did not support them. To Kobayashi's credit, he did create opportunities for women within the realm of theatre even if he did not outright advocate for gender inclusivity in the theatrical scene.

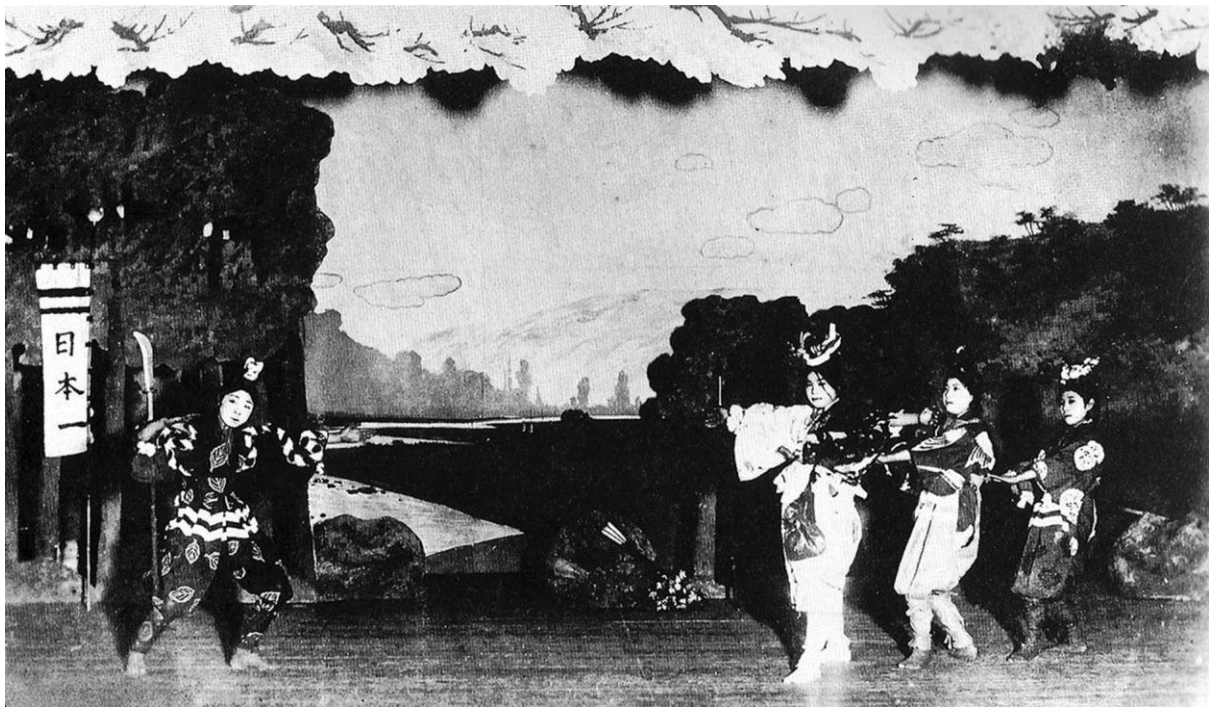


Figure 1: The first performance by the Takarazuka revue. Performed at “Paradise Theatre” on top of a converted indoor pool. 1914.

The ‘Otokoyaku’ is the name given to the group of women who specialise in male roles in Takarazuka performances while the term ‘musumeyaku’ is given to the female specialists (Brau 87). The revue is famous for its distinctive and tasteful characterisation of male roles. The actors go through extensive preparative training to perfect this act, like the disciplined Kabuki performers. These women will practice walking, talking, sitting, and just about any subtle gesture to convince us that they are male (Yamanashi 45).

A crucial observation regarding the charm of the otokoyaku is being mindful of the target audience. The main demographic of the audience is unmarried women and girls under the age of 25. In Japanese culture, they would be regarded as ‘*shojo girls*’ meaning young women (Berlin 39). However, before World War Two, the

greater part of the audience was shojo girls, but there were more college-aged men attending the revues shows than compared to the 21st century. Between the 1940s until the early 2000s, societal standards changed due to high demand and expectations toward young working men. The Takarazuka revues performances were once catered toward young men by including youthful characters dressed as soldiers and sailors shortly after the second world war (Yamanashi 23). Nowadays, it is not uncommon for men to stay in the office until late at night making them less likely to attend the theatre (Berlin 40). This indicates that the widening gender gap between the audience demographic is predominantly female due to cultural expectations.

As a costume designer, I understand the efforts put into productions by scenographers and the limited time limit given to prepare. Many go unappreciated while a lot of the credit is given to the actor's performance. With this research, I aim to create an appreciation of the scenographers by examining how their contributions enhance the actor's presence. This thesis will spotlight the technical role of the otokoyaku and how they create the charm of the character presented. This thesis will question how the art department and the actors can create the image of an idealised man using the otokoyaku as an example.

When researching the Takarazuka revue, it is exceedingly difficult to find several articles pertaining them. Whilst many articles tend to focus on the overall structure of the revue and its history some specialised texts about the otokoyaku focus on gender studies without a critical analysis of the behind-the-scenes work. I bring a refreshing take on the otokoyaku, appreciating the behind-the-scenes work that goes into creating the 'perfect man.' I had to use my research and experiences as a designer to justify the design decisions made.

Lastly, this thesis will follow a three-chapter structure. It will go in the order as if it were a performance: starting with applying makeup, then putting on the costume, and lastly entering onto the stage. Chapter 1 will concentrate on makeup, where I will look at the evolution of otokoyaku makeup, break down an image of an otokoyaku in action, and explain what certain makeup techniques do for the character. Then I will explain why this creates a desirable man. The second chapter will follow the costume design choices, again analysing a still image of the performance and what the scenographer's decisions contribute to an otokoyaku's persona. The last chapter will then investigate body language and subtle gestures employed by actors. Similarly to chapters one and two, images pulled from live performances will be used to justify the argument.

Chapter 1

Makeup Masks the Man

Makeup is one of the first processes an actor undergoes in the dressing room before a show begins. It is responsible not only for making a performer look good but providing context to a character's backstory. A character's context in the given universe of a performance heavily depends on makeup. The character's age, sex, wealth, and general health can be understood through the power of cosmetics and even special effects. Despite this, Otokoyaku makeup does not intend to create a realistic interpretation of a cis-gendered man (Robertson 433). The Takarazuka revue's charm comes from the knowledge that the otokoyaku is the essence of a man and a curated being. As audience members we are aware that the actors are biologically female, the makeup is just used to enhance the natural features of the actor to create the caricature of an otokoyaku version of a man (Yamanashi 94). This knowledge is part of the novelty of the Takarazuka revue. There are a few techniques that the makeup artists employed by the revue use to create the signature look of an otokoyaku. With a critical lens, this chapter will uncover the methods used in preparing hair, eyes, and using natural facial features, and the historical evolution of the Takarazukiennes' makeup. It will answer why and how the methods used add a layer of charm and character to an otokoyaku.

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why and how the methods used add a layer of charm and character to an otokoyaku.

To gain a clear insight into the peculiar makeup style, this chapter will first lay out the brief history of the evolution of makeup within the Takarazuka revue. The article 'Art of Japan, Japanisms and Polish-Japanese art relations' edited by Agnieszka Kluczevska-Wójcik and Jerzy Malinowski (2010), gives an excellent study of the evolution of the Takarazuka revues distinctive style of makeup. This paragraph will paraphrase the key points of the aforementioned article which will aid in understanding the importance of this chapter.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was not a clear distinction between otokoyaku and musumeyaku performers. Female performers were still uncommon in the early 20s and makeup was in its early stages of development on the female performers faces. For this reason, the costume was the crucial aspect in determining the difference between male-gendered specialists and female specialists. Since the Takarazuka revue was inspired by Western performance and Hollywood, many actors did not have access to the same products and makeup techniques which is why in the developmental years, costume was reliable in determining characters (Kluczevska-Wójcik, Malinowski 92). This in turn caused a more interesting and unique style to evolve, but it was a long process as it took up to 100 years.

Makeup was indistinct, not colourful and appeared more two-dimensional in the 1920s due to a lack of contouring. Makeup techniques were passed down from performer to performer. This orally taught method of teaching meant that the evolution of makeup techniques was slow, with evidence showing the application of makeup and the methods used did not drastically change until the late 1960s, as

seen in figure 2 and 3 (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 93). Comparing figure 2 and figure 3 it is evident that they are not from the same time period as there has been a significant change in eyeliner shape. In figure 3 there is a visible line drawn underneath the eye supported by false eyelashes. This is a stark contrast to figure 2 taking a more subtle approach to eyeliner (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 93). It was in this and the succeeding decade that the most modifications occurred. As the otokoyaku began to earn more recognition in the late 1960s, the distinction between otokoyaku and musumeyaku on stage became more apparent. For example, tokoyaku performers began to draw sideburns and heavily contour their faces (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 93).

It was only in the 1970s, however, that the iconic tacky and somewhat garish style of makeup really took off. The concept of '*yume no sekai*' which translates to a dream world was important to the revue (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 93). This concept permeated into the makeup style by the establishment of brightly coloured eyeshadows and lipsticks. Vivid colours were incorporated into performances, brighter blush, and the now staple pastel eyeshadows. Heavy false lashes became essential parts of the makeup, as well as drawing on double eyelids to hide the epicanthic fold, which was done to make the actor look more 'Western' to pay homage to Hollywood actors (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 93). The next big wave of change happened in the 21st century. This initiated the era of elegance and subtlety – however, ironically one can argue that there is nothing subtle about the heavy makeup application.

With an understanding of the historical context of otokoyaku makeup style, the most efficient way to engage with the charm of the otokoyaku makeup is

to break it down and let us systematically examine each component. These components will be hair, eyes, colours and shadows and the appeal of the actor being their own makeup artist.



Figure 2: An otokoyaku actor from an album of postcards photograph, late 1930s, Japan.



Figure 3: An otokoyaku actor featured in the Hoshigumi programme for ‘Gypsy Lord/Lover,’ 1970.

One notable detail of the revue is that, similarly to kabuki performers, the actors will learn how to do their makeup. This is dissimilar in the West where makeup artists are employed. Usually explored during their schooldays, upper class students pass down techniques and tips on applying the desired makeup look (Yamanashi 88). Naturally, there are makeup artists working for the revue, but it

is refreshing to see the actors create a personal style for themselves and their characters, allowing for variety and authenticity. It is common to see top star actors create their makeup looks backstage organically. It is almost like a ritual before the performance where an actor must paint her face and take the time to get in the mind frame of the character. By learning makeup themselves, the otokoyaku actors can explore their characters and create a face that corresponds with their persona and acting style. This ultimately aids in the quality of acting as the otokoyaku has taken time and consideration into the process of cultivating the character's face, creating a more sincere performance. They enter the studio as themselves and leave with a transformed face, the transformation on the outside richly adding to the portrayal of the character.

Expanding on the previous point, this essay will start from the top of the body by examining the hair, using a still from a recent performance. Pictured in figure 4 is the 2022 headshot of the actor Kanato Tsukishiro, who played Jay Gatsby in 'The Great Gatsby' directed by Shuichiro Koike (2022) (Takrazuka Revue official website). Shown below Tsukishiro wears her natural hair which is a common trait shared among most otokoyaku actors. Throughout the years it has become common for otokoyaku actors to sport short hair outside of their performance as it was more convenient. Wigs were used in past productions until an incident in 1962 that prompted people to change their perspectives. Kadota Ashoko, an otokoyaku actor stirred up controversy by cutting her natural hair short which went against Japanese societal norms of that time. She appeared in '*Bouquet d'Amour* (1932)' wearing her hair short and parting it to the side. She was the first to do so but certainly not the last. Ashoko inspired other performers to cut their hair and change the perspectives of what it means to be an otokoyaku

actor (Yamanashi 96). However, it was deemed to be too radical and controversial at the time. It is important to remember that Kobayashi's conservative ideals were still enforced at this time. Women still had to adhere to gendered stereotypes regardless of their character's gender on stage (Kluczevska-Wójcik, Malinowski 92). There were already fears that actors could become unappealing women if they began to adopt male characteristics outside of work. After all, being a traditional wife was seen as an end goal by many of the staff (Brau 80). It was also feared by many that women may find the newly masculinised women to be more attractive than men. Without realizing the cultural impact she would establish, Ashoko imbued the otokoyaku with another layer of charm.



Figure 4: Kanato Tsukishiro's official stage photo as Jay Gatsby from 'The Great Gatsby'. Directed by Shuichiro Koike. 2022.

Facial hair also plays a smaller role in the depiction of men. We see Tsukishiro sport thickened eyebrows and shaded in sideburns to reflect masculine features. A lot of the time, the lead otokoyaku does not have facial hair. However, it is not overdone to look tacky or distasteful. Pertaining to facial hair it has been seen in previous performances, just not as commonly. Facial hair prosthetics are

usually used to age characters in theatre. While facial hair has been applied on actors in past performances, it is not usually seen on the lead otokoyaku. This is because facial hair can sometimes age up a character in theatre which would go against the youthful appearance of the otokoyaku (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 92). Figure 5 below depicts one of the few instances where an otokoyaku lead amuses prosthetic facial hair. Context of time and place is also telling the lack of main characters with beards or moustaches, this is a direct result of Japanese beauty standards. In Japanese society, smooth and youthful skin is a favoured aesthetic. Rough stubble is associated with being unkept which is contrary to the perfectly manufactured otokoyaku (Monden 272).



Figure 5: Otokoyaku actor wears facial hair in the production 'Gone with the wind'. 1977.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, figure 4 is a clear image of classic otokoyaku makeup. Looking closely at this image, one can gain a better insight into the application of stage makeup. Staring with Tsukishiro's eyes, her eyes are lined with black eyeliner to create a rounder and prominent eye shape. Brown eyeshadow has been applied to her crease and eye bags. Her under eyes has brown eyeshadow just darker than her natural skin tone and the eyeshadow has been blended to just above the natural eyebags. This is done to increase the contrast

between the skin and the whites of the eye, in turn, giving the illusion of brighter bolder eyes (Kluczevska-Wójcik, Malinowski 92). A bright sparkly eye is associated with youthfulness and attractiveness (Monden 275). In other performances, pastels are used in the eye crease as the light colours soften the face as harsh colours may bitter the charm of the otokoyaku (Robertson 431). The shadow above the eye in the crease also gives the illusion of big eyes, along with highlighted inner corners. A person's eyes are seen as an attractive trait, which is why the actors put a great amount of effort into the eyes as they must draw the viewer's attention towards them. Being attractive is especially important to the impact of an otokoyaku on an audience as part of their goal is to 'seduce' the audience.

Looking back at figure 4, the character Gatsby is being perceived by the audience from a considerable distance. The actors features must be exaggerated slightly to convey emotions from a distance. The Takarazuka revue has shown repeatedly that they do not shy away from excessive makeup. Tsukishiro like many other otokoyaku actors cleverly use lights and shadows to transform herself into a tasteful caricature. Although the makeup is heavily applied, it is still done to flatter. Over the years, the Takarazuka style of makeup has been becoming more natural. This contrasts hugely to the past where red lips and hyper-stylised eyes were worn. Ultimately, embracing beauty is paramount to the revue as they strive to create dreams which falls into the allure of fabricated reality (Yamanashi 88).

The Takarazuka revue has spent years in seeking the balance between theatrical makeup that is excessive, and the charming semi-natural makeup seen

today. One thing that has drastically changed for the otokoyaku is contouring, as seen in figure 4. At first glance it is difficult to see the contouring but as subtle as it may be, there is contouring, and shadows created on Tsukishiro's cheekbones. She has applied darker colours to below her cheeks to carve out a chiselled cheekbone. This same technique can also be seen on her jawline. Another compelling example of using light and shadows to paint a face is through the contrasting highlights. The opposite of contour, highlights accentuate bone structure by creating depth that pops out. On their own, bronzer or highlight would not create the desired effect as it would read as very flat from afar. Thankfully though, bronzer and contour work harmoniously together to generate a three-dimensional face. The product of these is an angular and structured face that ties into the male beauty standards perpetuated in Japan.

This chapter has demonstrated the technical side of the otokoyaku makeup as well as the visual effect created and how that enhances the allure of an otokoyaku. Both the technicalities and visuals support the desired outcome which is an attractive male character that fits into the elegant beauty standard seen today (Kluczewska-Wójcik, Malinowski 92). The makeup style used by the otokoyaku is integral to the character and is a gem that has been passed down through the generations. Over the years, extraordinarily little has changed about the makeup application on a greater scale. It has established itself as a major part of the otokoyaku image by emphasising the theatrical and vibrant side of make-up. The makeup itself when isolated does not represent that of an authentic man, it should be considered more symbolism, rather than striving for accuracy. The intention with the makeup was never to be an accurate portrayal of a man but simply as

tools to enhance the actor's natural features while creating a believable character.

That in turn 'seduces' the audience into being invested in their performance.

Chapter 2

The man within the costume

The Latin proverb by Erasmus ‘Vestis virum facit’ translates to ‘Clothes make the man’ (Atkins). In the case of the Takarazuka revue, this certainly is true. The costumes are essential when creating a convincing character within the universe of the show. Especially when we carefully dissect an otokoyaku actor. Just because one is not biologically male does not mean that one can does not encapsulate what it means to represent a man on stage. This chapter will introduce costumes within the context of the Takarazuka revue. Concerning the otokoyaku male gender specialists and why they are essential in creating the charm of costuming.

One of the first things an audience will notice about production is the actor. Which is heavily represented by the costume. Humans are visual creatures and are drawn to brightness and extravagance. A quote from Pamela Howards ‘What is scenography?’ states that ‘A play can happen without scenery, but there is always at least one performer to be considered, and that performer must wear something. Costumes therefore become the extension of the actor in space.’ (Howard 156). Therefore, the spectator subconsciously processes what a costume can read about a character before they even realise it.

The Takarazuka revue certainly does not shy away from boldness and extravagance, especially in their costume design. The Takarazuka revue offers a wide range of styles in its costuming, but you will always be able to

spot the mesmerizing top stars. Due to their flamboyant nature, elaborate attire, and extraordinary stage presence. This is thanks to the three current chief costume designers; Tōda Ikuei, Arimura Jun and Hōgetsu Norie (Yamanashi 49).

Admirably the Takarazuka revue has collaborated with renowned fashion designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier and Takada Kenzo (Yamanashi 50). These collaborations are a luxury that highlights the scale of Takarazuka productions in terms of clothing and budget.

Firstly, one must acknowledge gender and the politics associated with the otokoyaku performers when writing about the revue. Although this chapter is directed toward costume, I believe that it is important to acknowledge the trans community when writing about the otokoyaku. Especially people who identify as non-binary. There is much discourse on gender and the Takarazuka revue. Much of the scholarship published on the revue has focused on gender and, in particular, androgyny in their performances. 'Jennifer Robertson's scholarship is particularly impressive in this regard. For example, her article 'The politics of androgyny in Japan: Sexuality and Subversion in the Theatre and Beyond.' 1992 (Robertson 419). She remarkably articulates the relationship between gender and the otokoyaku. She defines androgyny as 'the scrambling of gender markers – clothes, gestures, speech patterns, and so on – in a way that both undermines the stability of a sex-gender system premised on a male-female dichotomy and retains that dichotomy by either juxtaposing or blending elements of gender.' (Robertson 419). What can be gained from this quote is that the Takarazuka revue is aware of certain gender markers but will purposely blend traits associated with binary genders to collocate aspects such as a man with a soft-spoken voice.

Drawing this chapter back to its intention, the article ‘The politics of androgyny in Japan: Sexuality and Subversion in the Theatre and Beyond’ relates to costume, as the otokoyaku in the Takarazuka revue are often described as a ‘third gender’ (Brau 86). This technically means that the actors are not playing men. They are playing an idealised version of a man that has been curated to the female gaze. Kobayashi himself even proclaimed that the otokoyaku are not male, but more suave, charming, and handsome (Robertson 424). The costuming and makeup reflect that of a man but we as an audience are aware that this is just the basic characteristics of a man, but still possess their identity. In Japanese, the term ‘Chūsei’ was adopted, which means neutral or in-between. To a Western person, this could be compared to non-binary. The term ‘Ryōsei’ which loosely translates to the blending of the genders. Colloquially known as being intersexed (Robertson 421). Although these terms may not be interchangeable from the Japanese context to the English context. It is still important to acknowledge that the intention of the otokoyaku is the suggestion of a man and not to accurately portray one.

The otokoyaku can be compared to a peacock regarding costume. They draw our attention by being the most vibrant in the room. With their chests puffed out, dripping in jewels, and spreading their feathers to grab our attention. Take figure.6 for example, actor Rei Yuzuka has her arms stretched showing a certain authority and confidence. She is wearing a lively shade of pink. Without a doubt, they catch our eye by being the most visually dramatic in the room. The brightness of the pink has the purpose of standing out in comparison to the ensemble who sport a paler and less outlandish pink. The psychological

implication of this colour choice informs the spectator that Yuzuka's character is extraverted, confident, and lively (Gillette 381). It is common to see an otokoyaku adorned in high-quality materials which in comparison to the ensemble, clutch onto one's immediate attention.



Figure 6: Flower troupe star Rei Yuzuka in 'Genroku Baroque Rock' Directed by Tani Takaya. 2021.

An essay could be written solely on how fantastic and well-crafted the costumes are, however, that is not what I wish to explore. I wish to inquire the question of, 'What makes the otokoyaku's costumes of the Takarazuka revue so captivating, and how does it impact the actor's performance?' Not just

visual impact but the subtleties and technique in the costume. I want to seek how these costumes change an actor's mindset. I will be asking the question of 'how?' How are they created? How do they change an actor? How do we know the temperament of a character just by what they are wearing? And most importantly, how do we know that these are the idealisation of a safe man?



Figure 7: The Flower troupes performance of "A Fairy Tale -The Spirit of the Blue Rose-". Starring Rio Asumi as Elu de la Rose. Directed by Ueda Keiko. 2019.

Figure 7 is an image of otokoyaku performer Rio Asumi as Elu de la Rose. In the 2019 production of "A Fairy Tale -The Spirit of the Blue Rose-". This paragraph will break down the costumes pictured above in figure 7. Initially, we can tell who the main character is. Asumi has a very striking appearance. One of the first things noticed is the colour of the costume, the bright blue stands out amongst the drab and dull grey tones. It is hauntingly beautiful.

The main character is almost like a bright spirit surrounded by normal people. It is particularly important to note the choice of the shade of blue used. People have conscious and subconscious reactions to colour. Which is further influenced by culture and social climate (Gillette 99). Pastel colours are often associated with femininity. While blues are affiliated with feelings of security, strength, coolness, and pleasantry (Gillette 100). In this case it appears that the pastels allude to the otokoyaku being a softer and gentle man. Which is a priority the revue intends to display. Even though the entire outfit Asumi wears is light blue, we are still able to judge that she is not playing a woman. We can deduce this by looking into silhouettes. The silhouette of the costume in figure 7 will be examined further in this chapter.

Beauty is subjective; however, culture has a key impact on what is deemed as conventionally attractive. To explore why Takarazuka actors are seen as attractive, we first must understand the beauty standard in Japan. Even though human bodies come in many shapes and forms, youthful masculinity is often favoured over the mesomorphic build (Monden 272). Which is considered attractive in Western cultures. The post war beauty standard in Japan shifted to favouring the female gaze's interpretation of masculine beauty (Monden 272). Smooth skin, youthfulness, big eyes and being non-threatening are characteristics that have been portrayed in the new Japanese beauty standard. Which heavily relates to the original ideal beauty of the otokoyaku. This beauty is partially flawed as it is being viewed through the gender binary, which the otokoyaku can be considered to be outside of this binary. Which would have its own beauty standard (Monden 276).

In theatre silhouette generates a story about the character. A strong structured shoulder emphasises the ideal triangular body shape of a man. Creating broadened shoulders and a narrowed waist. It transforms a slender female figure into something more robust simply by changing a small element of the costume. High-waisted pants draw in our attention to the length of the leg. The silhouette has also been strategically proportioned in a 1/3 ratio. One third of the figure is the torso while two thirds are the legs. This is a flattering silhouette as it gives off the appearance of being slimmer and taller. The shorter torso also exaggerates the broadness of the actor's shoulders. All these elements combined contribute to creating the ideal physique of slenderness and androgyny through the eyes of Japanese society (Monden 273).

Another way of identifying that this is the main character is by homing in on the details of the costume. It is a more subtle part of the design that may not always be read from a distance, especially to someone who does not come from a background in design. Looking at the example above we can deduce that glitter and sequence are almost always reserved for the star actors. While the ensemble still wears tailored garments, they are never too flashy. It is also important to note that there is a variety of textures on Asumi's costume while the ensemble is dressed in smoother fabrics. Howard states that 'if a fabric is wrongly 'cast' at this decision-making stage, it will never be right for the part' (Howard 167). Careful consideration has been put into 'casting' the fabrics that are on Asumi. The actor has cracked and textured textiles which subtly alludes to the feeling of roughness. But that roughness is toned down by the smooth baby blue waistcoat. Looking at the construction of the waist coat, it has a smooth curve which softens the otherwise angular silhouette (Gillette 402). The combination of

harsh angles and a central smooth curve breaks the roughness of the silhouette. Which connects to Kobayashi's idea of sensitive masculinity by being rough but not too rough (Robinson 424). Sensitive masculinity is quintessential to the Takarazuka essence.

Lastly, I want to inspect how the costume structure affects the actor's performance. In the previous chapter, I delved into body language. This body language is aided by the costumes. Its form can change someone's posture by having smaller armholes or using a more rigid fabric. Naturally, the costume is actors. Once an actor is suited up in costume the real transformation occurs from within. The moment an actor such as Asumi is suited up, they are the character, and not just reciting lines. An interview with veteran otokoyaku actor Saori Mine for the New York Times helps us better understand how costume can create a character-

“When I put on my makeup, I start turning into a man,” she said. It was a few minutes before she was to take the stage, and she sat in the lobby of the rehearsal theatre, manspreading on a backless sofa, an elbow planted on one knee. “By the time I have my costume on, I’m Billy.” (“From Japan, a “Chicago” You Probably Haven’t Seen, Published 2016”).

From this quote it is evident that Mine becomes the character Billy once she is in costume and makeup. She rejects her feminine persona in favour of the character she portrays. Mine admits that Chapter three will explore this notion of body language creating character further.

A theatrical production is nothing without the costume department. It sets the tone, colours, and era of the show. Clothing tells us a wealth of information about the world and character. Because of the intelligent use of styling, we are given so much information about the otokoyaku characters. Such as silhouettes to make a more masculine physique. Accessories to assert the importance of the central character. The transformation takes place from within the actor.

Chapter 3

Creating an otokoyaku through body language

How a person carries themselves on stage speaks truths about their character. A hunched-over back and small steps allude to a person being old while standing with shoulders square to the hips and head up denotes a more confident persona. In theatrical acting posture and body language must be rehearsed to portray a message of a character's demeanour. This chapter introduces the importance of body language in crafting a compelling otokoyaku. Effective communication with a crowd goes beyond verbal expression. Connecting through body language is far more important concerning an audience's engagement with an act from an empathetic standpoint. Non-verbal communication transcends the barrier of language. For monolingual people such as myself, it is difficult to understand what is being spoken during a Takarazuka performance without subtitles. However, Phillip V. Lewis makes a great argument for this in his journal article, 'Body Language: Nonverbal Behaviour as a Communicative Stimulus.' It reads: 'Most of us speak at least one oral language, but everyone speaks body language' (V. Lewis 245). Position on stage, how tense or relaxed the body is, facial expression, posture, and cadence. Together, these deliver non-spoken cues collectively convey to an audience about a character's disposition. In the case of an otokoyaku, their goal is to embody the essence of masculinity as organically as possible. Which involves challenging social stereotypes associated with masculinity.

This thesis has now highlighted that body language plays a crucial role in the audience's reception of the otokoyaku. But why is it so important that the otokoyaku employ male gestures on stage? Firstly, I would like to briefly discuss gender and the language I will be using in this chapter. It is important to acknowledge that genders exist outside of the binary and need to be explored and researched within the context of the otokoyaku. I will be using the gender-neutral word 'actor' instead of actress, as it refers to the performing artist regardless of gender. Nonetheless, in this context, I will only be writing about men and women who fall into the gender binary when referring to body language. Due to ample training, the otokoyaku have a deep understanding of the differences between the typical gestures of people who were socialised as men and those who were socialised as women. Which is why I will only be researching within the binary for simplicity.

The actors who play otokoyaku and musumeyaku follow rigorous training to perfect their body language. Referencing Lorie Brau, in his journal article reviewing the Takarazuka revue, he notes: 'Although acting classes are conducted along the lines of the Stanislavski method, the students are also trained in a manner comparable to that which is used in kabuki actor training, that is, through the memorization of *kata*-codified behaviours centred on gesture, dress, and voice that help create a role.' (Brau 86). By following the memorised checklist and through vigorous practice, these *kata*-codified behaviours become second nature to the actor. The more assimilated an actor becomes with the learned language, the more it becomes instinctive on stage. Every cue on stage, no matter how subtle, reveals information about a character. If we as an audience even for a second see the actor hesitate, we lose part of the character. The actor of course is

only human, mistakes are bound to be made. There is a lot of worth in preparation and making the performance easier for the actor. The otokoyaku must engage with a text first, channelling and understanding the feelings that the script evokes. One must be aware but also not too aware of the feelings the text gives. Becoming hyperaware will make words and gestures flow less naturally. One cannot be suave or charming if they are constantly in their head anticipating the next move. This will just become a stiff delivery and even lead to overacting. The aim is not to be an authentic man but to have authentic allure onstage (Stefano 32). Finding a harmonious balance is what is crucial to the act.



Figure 8: Flower troupe stars Rei Yuzuka and Madoka Hoshikaze perform together in “Genroku Baroque Rock”. Dir. Tani Takaya. 2021.

Figure 8 depicts a static image taken from the 2021 production 'Genroku Baroque rock'. It features the two central characters which are an otokoyaku and a musemuyaku which is a common trope in almost all Takarazuka productions. Chronosuke (played by otokoyaku top star Yuzuka) leads Kira (musumeyaku actor Hoshikaze) up a staircase. Using body language and staging, the two actors create the fantasy of Chronosuke being an ideal man. This paragraph will break down and investigate what elements make this portrayal convincing within the context of the show. Chronosuke gently guides Kira up the staircase taking the lead. She follows behind obediently. Chronosuke leans into Kira with his head and torso while his lower body drives him up the staircase. Showing that even while occupied by another action his focus is still on Kira.

The musumeyaku also acts as the foil to the otokoyaku (Robertson 423). She possesses the opposite traits of the visibly confident man; she follows him obediently using the banister of the staircase to balance herself. The actor has also been carefully cast, as she is smaller in height and body size, and has a circular young-looking face. These elements collectively contribute to the portrayal of innocence in the female character. Thus, strengthening the masculine essence of the otokoyaku. Although it could be interpreted that Kira is more submissive, this is not the case within the context of the otokoyaku. In reality, what this is doing for the two characters is revealing Chronosuke's tender and attentive side as he gives Kira reassurance and guidance up the staircase. This nurturing and guiding side of the character is evidence of the 'dream man' that the Takarazuka revue strives to create (Robertson 424). Figure 9 is another example highlighting the difference between an otokoyakus and musemuyakus stage presence. Their height differences have been taken into account when casting for this performance took

place. Which is another visual cue used to subconsciously make the audience believe that the otokoyaku is more masculine than the musumeyaku.



Figure 9: Suzuho Makaze and Madoka Hoshikaze showing height difference between otokoyaku and musumeyaku “El Japón”. Directed by Oono Takuji. 2019.

The effect that this implements on the audience leaves them craving the same loving attention the musumeyaku received. A huge part of the revues appeal is creating the idea of a safe and loving man. The coordinators of the Takarazuka revue are also extremely aware of their target audience. As mentioned in the introduction, the demographic of Takarazuka fans is predominantly ‘*shojo*’ girls. Women who are in their early twenties but are not married. It does include adolescent girls who are still in school (Robertson 426). By acknowledging their

demographic and catering the character portrayed to the desires of the fan base, the revue creates a unique relationship with the audience by appealing to their wants and needs. Thus, establishing a parasocial relationship but emotional connection between spectator and actor.

One point which has been mentioned continuously throughout this thesis is that having the knowledge of otokoyaku life outside of the stage makes them more appealing. By paying attention to the nuances in otokoyaku history, one can better understand what its original intentions were, as well as how ironic it has come to be today. The otokoyaku actors had to study men diligently to create their characters. Gender roles were a central topic of the musicals they performed so it was paramount that they could permeate that. However, the fear that these women could become too masculinised circulated and that the actors could soon become undesirable wives (Robertson, *Theatrical Resistance*, 168). Kobayashi, the founder of the Takarazuka revue had to counter that fear or else his life's work would be jeopardised. He argued that his revue fit into the '*kokumingeki undo*' which translates to state theatre. *Kokumingeki undo* was created to advance Japanese society in the 1930s. Kobayashi's defence was that, by studying the attributes of a man. By being in their shoes and engaging in a sympathetic role to understand the struggles of a man. The otokoyaku actor would become a better wife and learn to appreciate the efforts men go through (Robertson, *Theatrical Resistance*, 165). Ultimately Kobayashi intended for the actors to retire in their late 20s or early 30s to pursue the life of a stay-at-home spouse. Thus perpetuating gender roles in Japanese society.

Visual design decisions are not the only factor that contribute to an actors performance. It is also important to acknowledge that voice acting contributes significantly to the presentation of an otokoyaku. Women in general tend to have higher pitched voices than that of men, naturally there are plenty of exceptions but this is just a general rule of thumb. To skilled actors such as Yuzuka, their voice switch is just like putting on a costume. As Jennifer Robertson put it:

- 'Outside of the character they switch back to using their authentic voices. However, on stage, an otokoyaku exaggerates their voice. They sing in a deeper register than what comes naturally to them. Not only that, but they change their cadence, tone, and vocabulary. Through years of training and perseverance, these women strive to embody smooth buttery voices (Yamanashi 101).

Their goal is not to convince the audience that there is a man on stage. Although some people may misunderstand the intention. There is already an unwritten agreement between the otokoyaku and the spectator that the character is the sexually ambiguous 'essence of a man.' Since we are aware of this agreement, the otokoyaku creates a smooth and silky voice. Less rough than that of a man and gentler (Yamanashi 101). This creates a more appealing man that does not exist outside of the Takarazuka theatre walls.

In terms of acting, no matter how visually striking a character may be, if the actor cannot portray the aesthetic of a character through body cues or can only offer a stiff delivery of lines, the character will be lost as focus would be on the awkward acting, the charm of the otokoyaku would diminish. As the saying goes "It doesn't matter what's on the outside, it's what's on the inside that counts." Part of this is true for the Takarazuka revue. Once stripped of its aesthetics and beauty, there is still a multifaceted character behind all the charm and sparkles. On the inside, there are many years of disciplined training (Yamanashi 43). The actors

have studied their peers and societal expectations, and curated to embody the fantasied masculinity that they are. Top stars such as Rei Yuzuka make this appear so effortless. Her body language flows naturally on stage due to years of commitment and hard work. The effect of this on stage is beautiful. The combination of makeup and costume alone enhances an actor's confidence in a role. Together they create phenomenal and realistic characters.

Conclusion

The otokoyaku is the embodiment of the essence of a man. They shine their brightest on stage winning, over the hearts of their dedicated fanbase and new people alike. I like many others was captivated by the otokoyaku when I first saw them. I also could not believe how unheard of they were for such a popular troupe in Japan; they deserve more recognition than they receive. Between the incredible detail on the costumes and the eccentric makeup which reminded me of drag art, I was fascinated by their beauty. This inspired me in my research of what exactly is the allure of the otokoyaku. This thesis has demonstrated how the creative department collaborates to cultivate the 'perfect man.' Which is a young and beautiful man who is also acts as a safe space for women by possessing caring qualities.

I wanted to explore and appreciate the art department that diligently works with the actors. This exploration led me to learn how they enhance the performances. As a designer myself it is frustratingly often that our hard work goes unrecognised, often solely being credited to the actor's efforts. Of course, actors play a critical role in the success of a show. It is the combination of design, performance, and knowledge of the history of the Takarazuka revue that make them so captivating. That is why I decided to investigate the otokoyaku, a quirky and captivating feature of the Takarazuka revue. This study highlights how the talent of actors and designers complement each other and work together to make a performance spectacular. This study is shown firstly by providing the reader with nuanced knowledge of the makeup and costume department. This knowledge [isbring](#) the decisions, logical thinking and research very often not seen by the

spectator. What they see is just the performance, which as I have stated is enhanced greatly by the scenographers. Another factor which is specific to the revue is also the knowledge of the novelty of the otokoyaku. By being aware of the short but extreme history behind the otokoyaku, one's enjoyment of the performances is excelled as they feel a stronger connection the actor. Parasocial relationships keep some but not all spectators hooked on the otokoyaku. During my research, I encountered many blogs dedicated to the otokoyaku, the revue and even specific members of the troupe.

Although there are many research papers on the Takarazuka revue, the range of them is limited. I would like to acknowledge that most of my research has been conducted through a Western lens as I could only read papers in English, which were almost always written by English speakers. Except for the few exceptions of translated pages from Japanese. Many papers focus on either summarising the history and structure of the revue or on the gender politics associated with the otokoyaku. Both are fascinating, but I wanted to take a different approach to researching them, by analysing the effects of the art department on the appeal of the otokoyaku. Since this thesis is mainly an analysis with deductions made from the perspective of a designer, it is subject to some bias.

This study offers a new perspective on the Takarazuka revue by bringing knowledge of cross-cultural art forms. Nowadays many Western people are enticed by the ever-growing popularity of Asian media, such as anime, K-pop, and k-skincare. However, it is important to be aware that even in the 1920s Japanese people were inspired by Western society and culture. I believe that

sharing knowledge, especially in the performing arts is crucial to creativity and development of interesting ideas.

In chapter one I highlighted that makeup is applied to paint the illusion of masculinity. Creating the illustration of a man's face contributes to formulating an otokoyaku by changing the structure of an actor's appearance. Through various techniques such as hair, contouring and choice of colours we are shown a brand new perception of masculinity. While facial hair is an obvious indicator that the character is male there is still a grey area where bright pinks and purples are used on the eyes. Building upon this chapter two explored the importance of costume. It is the union of costume and makeup departments that enhance each other. I argued that the costumes in the Takarazuka revue create the illusion of masculinity by similarly to makeup enhancing what is already there and then creating new parts. For example, shoulder padding and applying sideburns are completely new extensions of the actor. Finally in chapter three I argued that the combination of costume and makeup provides an actor with the confidence to present as a character onstage. Small details such as heeled boots force an actor to change their posture thus strengthening a character's portrayal of their role. I also highlighted that countering the otokoyaku with the musumeyaku added a contrast on stage. The musumeyaku accentuate the otokoyaku's body language by acting in a manner that would be deemed as more 'feminine'.

Considering the evidence presented, it can be affirmed that creating a unique cultural phenomenon takes time and effort. Design is fundamental to performance by creating visually striking imagery that interests an audience and evokes emotions within an audience by aiding performers in their act. I believe

that if the otokoyaku characters did not have interesting makeup and costuming that is not seen to the same extent in other theatre forms, they would lose their charm. Which is what makes them lovable. Without their charm they simply just exist without the same appeal.

As my final remark, I would like to highlight that the Takarazuka revue are still thriving 100 years after their humble roots. With the rise of the ever-increasing popularity of East Asian media in Western countries such as The United States and Great Britain. The Takarazuka revues future cannot be predicted. Will it become a household name as well-known as Kabuki, or perhaps maybe international performances will be a common export? Such as the infrequent tours the Takarazuka revue has accomplished in the past. It is difficult to predict the future of the revue as society and the arts are facing changes at a rapid pace. However, we should embrace whatever change will happen as this change consequently causes art to develop. Ultimately this thesis enhances one's understanding of the Takarazuka revues unique approach to theatre.

Appendix

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