**Takarazuka Revue Company (Takarazuka Kageki-dan, Takarazuka, Hyogo Prefecture, 1913-)**

**Summary**

The popular Takarazuka Revue Company, based in Takarazuka, Hyogo Prefecture, is the longest established musical theatre company in Japan. The performers are unmarried females; if a dancer marries, she must retire from the company. The Takarazuka Revue Company – actually five separate troupes – is managed by the Hankyu Railway Corporation. It has a training school with a dormitory system and exclusive theatres, publishes magazines, broadcasts television programs, and owns the Communication satellite channel. The Takarazuka Revue Company can be viewed as an example of the ‘modernization’ and ‘Westernization’ of Japanese theatre and the industrialization of its business during the early twentieth century by rejecting the traditional Kabuki style as well as introducing female performers to Japanese stages and adopting western subject matter and theatrical practices by establishing multiple performance groups to meet audience demands.

**History**

The Takarazuka Revue Company was founded in 1913 by Kobayashi Ichizo (1873-1957), the administrator of the Hankyu Railway Corporation. Takarazuka was the terminus of Hankyu line from Osaka and Kobayashi believed people would take the countryside trains for pleasure if there were some attractions to visit, so he developed the land along the railroad line into a residential area for the middle class and built the modern amusement park, the Takarazuka New Hot Spring, with a spa, pool, and theatre, which featured Western song and dance shows by young female performers. He believed that Kabuki, although the most popular theatre genre in the country, was becoming outdated, and people, especially the middle class women and children, wanted theatre in the Western show style.

**Importance to Modernism and Modernization**

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, stage performances by women were forbidden in Japan; male actors, for example, played all the roles in Kabuki. In an act of contrariness and in order to help modernize theatre in Japan, Kobayashi decided to cast young women, making ‘Modesty, Fairness and Grace’ the group’s motto. The training of these performers was conducted in the Takarazuka Music School, and the Ministry of Education implicitly condoned the female performers by authorizing the school’s licence. Kobayashi built large theatres and provided many low price seats because he wanted to halt the association of theatre with Karyu-kai, the exclusive world of geishas and their patrons, which had a great influence on the old Japanese theatre forms such as Kabuki and Nihon-buyo. After graduating the Takarazuka Music School, every performer is still called ‘student’ by the company officials and the fans, even though she performs on the Takarazuka stage as a ‘professional’. Emphasizing amateurism in the Takarazuka counteracts a negative association with the commercialism of the theatre box office.

The Takarazuka Revue had its first performance in 1914, when the company’s name was the Takarazuka Girls Opera Company (the Takarazuka Shojo Kageki-dan). The main works in early years were original operettas based on Japanese narratives such as *Urashima-Taro* (The *Story of Urashima Taro*), Shitakiri-Suzume (*The Tale of the Tongue-Cut Sparrow*) and *Taketori-Monogatari* (*The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*), and Western stories such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Cleopatra*, *Jehanne Darc*, and *The Arabian Nights*. Ten years later, the company became popular enough to acquire the Takarazuka Grand Theater, one of the largest Japanese theatres with 3,000 seats. In 1927, the company staged *Mon Paris* (libretto and lyrics by Kishida Tatsuya, choreography by Shirai Tetsuzou, music by Takagi Kazuo). This was the first work to introduce the revue format to Japan, and became the turning point of the company. Kishida, who visited Europe and the United States from 1926 to 1927 to study performance and staging conventions, reproduced the scenery of Paris and other foreign cities in a revue show format. The scale of *Mon Paris* – sixteen acts with no curtain, over 100 characters, and a presentation time of ninety minutes – far exceeded the scope of Takarazuka’s previous productions as well as other Western-style plays in Japan. After the success of this work, the company adopted the revue format. The group changed its name to the Takarazuka Revue Company in 1940. Because of the growing popularity of the Takarazuka Revue, the company built new theatres in Tokyo and other large cities, increased the ensemble, and divided the original group into five separate troupes: Flower, Moon, Snow, Star, and Special Course. In 1938, selected members of the Takarazuka Revue toured to Germany, Italy, Poland; this was the company’s first performance abroad. Today the Takarazuka Revue has performed abroad, in the United States, United Kingdom , Canada, France, Russia, China, and other countries. Not only the company’s popularity but also the stable capital and management by the Hankyu Railway Corporation contributed to the growth of the Takarazuka troupes. In 1960s, the gorgeous spectacles began to be seen as outdated and audiences decreased, but the company made a great hit and succeeded in reclaiming a new field with *The Rose of Versailles* (Berusaiyu no Bara, 1974), an adaptation of Riyoko Ikeda’s graphic novel for Japanese girls, which deals with the tragic love story of young sweethearts torn apart by the French Revolution.

More recently, the Takarazuka not only performs original works written by the creative staff, but also stages adaptations of famous Western musicals, plays, films, or novels, including *West Side Story*, *Elizabeth*, *Bonnie* *and Clyde* and *Casablanca*, among others. All roles are still played by females, even though Kobayashi originally had envisioned that the Takarazuka would eventually become a mixed-gender musical-revue company. His wish was not realized because of strong opposition from audiences.

Most of these audience members are now women, ranging from girls to the elderly. They demonstrate their loyalty to a particular performer by joining fan clubs, wearing scarves or uniforms embroidered with performer’s name, and attending performances with other fan club members.

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**Online Resources**

The Takarazuka Revue Company (in English): http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/

The Takarazuka Music School (in English): http://www.tms.ac.jp/english/index.html

The Takarazuka Revue Company’ magazines and books (in Japanese): http://www.hankyubooks.com/t\_kageki/index.html

The Sumire Museum (in Japanese): http://takarazuka-c.jp/page0217.html

The Takarazuka on demand: http://bb.goo.ne.jp/special/takarazuka/

**Selected Works**

*Dom-Brako* (1914, Sueharu Kitamura)

*Urashima-Taro* (1914, Hiroshi Andou)

*Sakura-Daimyou* (1916, Issei Hisamatsu)

*Hina-Matsuri* (1917, Ichizou Kobayashi)

*Oshi-Nyoubou* (1919, Shikou Tsubouchi)

*Haru-kara Aki-he* (1921, Rikuhei Umemoto)

*Mon Paris* (1927, Tatsuya Kishida)

*Parisette* (1930, Tetsuzou Shirai)

*Chinese Story Gu-Bijin* (1951, Tesuzou Shirai)

*The Rose of Versailles* (1974, based on Riyoko Ikeda’s graphic novel, adaptation and dramatization by Shinji Ueda, 1974)

References and Further Reading

Robertson, J. E. (1998) *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [In this book. the Takarazuka Revues and Japanese popular culture are considered from the viewpoint of sexual politics, modernism, nationalism, and imperialism. However, some Japanese researchers responded negatively to this book because the author interprets Japanese same-sex friendships through Western love relations. This book generate extreme reactions, both positive and negative in Japan.]

Stickland, L. R. (2008) *Gender Gymnastics: Performing and Consuming Japans Takarazuka Revue*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press. [This book examines the history of the Takarazuka Revue from the foundation period to date using interviews with company members and fans as well as archival research.. It includes a discussion of life after graduation of the members of the company.]

Rutherford, J. (2011) *Cherry Blossoms, Sushi and Takarazuka: Seven Years in Japan*, London: Little Wren. [This essay is by a British woman who lived in Japan for seven years. Through the experience of the one middle-age woman, it depicts a warm interchange with the Japanese, the difficulties of a culture gap, and the charm of the Takarazuka Revue.

Yamanashi, M. (2012) *A History of the Takarazuka Revue Since 1914: Modernity, Girls’ Culture, Japan Pop*. Boston: Global Oriental. [This is an important book about Takarazuka Revue that a Japanese researcher wrote and published in English. Takarazuka Revue is often mentioned from the point of view of gender in Europe and America, but the author of this book discusses the history and the significance of the modernization of theatre, customs, and society in Japan. This book is beneficial not only to know the history of the Takarazuka Revue but also to understand Japanese modern culture.]

**Paratextual Material:**

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<http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/history.html>

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<https://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/toiawase_s.html>

<https://ja-jp.facebook.com/TakarazukaRevue>