

Toshio Hosokawa

Hanjo

Opera in One Act - 6 Scenes – (2003/04)

Libretto by Toshio Hosokawa

Based on HANJO, a Nô play by Yukio Mishima

translated by Donald Keene

This work was commissioned by the Festival D'Aix-en-Provence and was written in the fall of 2003 and early 2004. It is my second opera.

I want this new opera of mine to be different from those created by westerners, and to be linked to the traditional Japanese theatre of Nô and Kabuki. At the same time, I want it to be an opera which resonates with contemporary audiences and overcomes the limited expressive capacity of Nô or Kabuki. For that purpose, it was necessary for me to study the traditions of western-style opera and to learn many things from them.

I have used for the libretto of this opera a play of the same title from the collected *Modern Nô Plays* of Yukio Mishima, which Mishima based on an original Nô drama also called *Hanjo*. Both Mishima's version and mine, while based on Japanese tradition, overcome its limitations, and while making the best use of methods learned from western theatre, revive old material in modern form.

Nô is an opera form unique to Japan which flourished in the 14th and 15th centuries. Words, music, song, gesture (acting and dance) are all unified by one strong style. In most Nô plays the lead character is either someone who has died or a woman who has gone mad. These characters exist in an alien world from which they descend into the reality of our world in search of their soul's salvation, and converse with a person living in the real world. Nô drama is other-worldly, like a dream.

I wrote *Hanjo* as if it were a dream. The leading role of Hanako lives in a world of madness beyond our everyday reality. She waits a long time for the man she loves to come back. When he finally arrives, however, for her he is no longer the man she loves. Her fantasy image of the man has become more real than the actual man in front of her.

I wanted to depict through music a drama which travels back and forth across the border between dream and reality, between madness and sanity. Perhaps a person can hear the voice that can only be heard in the realm of dreams more deeply in music than in drama. I tried to depict the voice of a person who travels back and forth this way between dream and reality, the orchestra in the background slowly changing its appearance like an unrolling picture scroll. Into that picture scroll, silence is gradually but strongly woven, just as blank space is strongly woven into the middle of a picture.

There are times when dreams possess a strong reality. And perhaps that reality can also paint a powerful picture of the truth of the reality in which we live.

Neither the instruments nor singing techniques of Nô are used in this music. I do not want to create music which copies the outer form of Japanese traditional music and makes it into an exotic arrangement in modern style. Instead I want to make the essence of Nô music live again in completely different form. It is music which generates silence (what in Japanese can also be called *ma*, or "pause"); after which, sound, while slowly circling the borderline of silence, travels into the realm of dreams.

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