

GIOVANNI VITTORIO ROSI'S MUSICAL THEATRE:  
OPERA, OPERETTA, AND THE WESTERNISATION OF MODERN JAPAN<sup>1</sup>

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Fin-de-siècle Europe saw the flourishing of what we now collectively call 'popular musical theatre'. It was made manifest in varying genres such as operetta (centred particularly on Vienna), opéra-bouffe (in Paris), burlesque and musical comedy (in London), and a wide range of entertainments in a music hall or a cabaret, all of which appealed to the middle classes unlike the somewhat onerous and alienating opera. Each genre was created to target its local and specific audience and was embedded in the culture of its birthplace. However, at the same time, adapted and translated, a work of musical theatre sometimes surpassed national boundaries – an English musical comedy was performed in German cities and Vienna, and a French opera-bouffe reached the States – and, as a result, it blurred the regionally generated generic differences. Thus, as Len Platt puts it, «musical theatre was one of the early popular cultures to be organised on a global scale and demonstrated some of the features, albeit in embryonic form that have since become associated with both modern and postmodern account of globalisation» (PLATT 2014, p.35).

The prime aim of this article is to examine the apparently 'global' nature of musical theatre but from a rather unique line of enquiry: how musical theatre in Europe reached Japan in the early twentieth century and how it developed an 'afterlife' in unforeseen ways in the new land.

My investigation began in order to illuminate two problems encountered in previous musico-theatrical studies: those of 'globalisation' and 'Orientalism'. Previous studies seem to have considered the geographically wide dissemination of musical theatre solely as an issue of globalisation. In the age of Empire, a West-End musical comedy may have been shown as far as in India or Australia, but this does not signify that the genre was 'globalised'. This is because there usually was no clear demographic difference between the work's originally intended audience in London and its 'new' audience in India or Australia, since the latter consisted largely of British expatriates. Only when a cultural production faced new audiences from totally different cultural backgrounds, would fractures appear in the unfolding patterns of globalisation. Japan's first encounter with European musical theatre was precisely of this kind. Ironically, however, it occurred as part of the country's willing embrace of the cultural imperialism of the West, as we will see.

In musicology, encounters between the West and non-Western 'Others' have been discussed largely in relation to representations of other cultures on the western stage, and through the prism of 'Orientalism'<sup>2</sup>. True, we have plenty of such examples, even if we limit our discussion to 'things Japanese' in musical theatre in London at the turn of twentieth century. There were from comic operas such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1885) and Owen Hall and Sydney Jones's *The Geisha* (1896) as well as minor ballets at music halls such

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<sup>1</sup> All Japanese words appearing in this article are romanised accordingly to the modified Hepburn system. Japanese names are written in the western order (i.e. the first name first followed by the surname) despite the country's convention. All Japanese items here are translated into English by the present author.

<sup>2</sup> Recent discussions concerning 'Orientalism' in musical theatre include: PLATT 2004, Chapter 3; and EVERETT 2007. For an overview of Orientalism in the musico-theatrical realm, see: AL-TAEE 2008; and TARLING 2015.

as *Oriella* (1891) and *In Japan* (1902)<sup>3</sup>. However, exactly at this time, Japan became interested in European culture, and these mutual cultural reflections occurred in tandem, triggered and facilitated by Japan's own politico-cultural situation at that time.

For more than 200 years Japan confined herself with the *sakoku* policy [the policy isolating the country], denying any foreign trade apart from those with the Chinese and the Dutch. In 1853, however, the US commodore Matthew C. Perry reached Japan under a presidential mission and placed the country in turmoil (CULLEN 2003, p. 175; Cf. MCOMIE 2006). Within a year, somewhat reluctantly, the country made her ports open to the West, by signing treaties with the Americans, the British and the Russians.

Following the reopening, especially after the restoration of the imperial rule in 1858, Japan strived to modernise itself through westernisation. It was in that transformation that European musical theatre as a whole played an interesting role, although Western musicology has hitherto paid very little attention to it.

As an example of this cultural encounter, this article will examine the central role of the Italian dancer/director Giovanni Vittorio Rosi (1867-?, ILL. 1)<sup>4</sup>, who was instrumental in introducing western musical theatre to Japan. Rosi allegedly trained at La Scala<sup>5</sup>, and enjoyed a successful career as a mime and choreographer in London's major musical halls before arriving in Japan following an invitation from Teikoku gekijo [the Imperial Theatre] in Tokyo. Rosi's attempts to familiarize the Japanese audience with western musical theatre seem to some to have been to little avail, and eventually he left the country for the USA.

So far, Rosi's venture in Japan has been discussed only by scholars specialising in Japanese regional, social and cultural studies, many of whom seem to lack a detailed understanding of western art music<sup>6</sup>. Typically, they ascribe Rosi's failure to his 'elitism', asserting that, faced with the low standard of Japanese singers, he had to put up with makeshift, truncated performances of the light, musical-theatre type even if he himself was longing for the grandeur of opera proper<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, previous literature tends to treat Japan's early reception of western opera as an isolated phenomenon and focuses mainly on the influence of Rosi and his productions on Japan's popular culture<sup>8</sup>. A full assessment of Rosi's work in relation to Japan's early encounter with western opera is still pending, and I hope this article will lay some firm foundations in this regard. Also, by tracing the chequered experience Rosi endured in Japan, I hope to demonstrate how the concept of European musical theatre became blurred in a 'global' setting – it not only lost its initially intended meaning but also in merging with opera (its elite counterpart), it constructed a very particular hybrid symbol of western culture. This hybrid symbol was the product of a complex dialectic between changing cultural concepts in the West and those in a remote environment<sup>9</sup>.

#### ROSI'S CAREER IN ITALY

We will begin by tracing Rosi's career in Europe and examining those factors which pre-disposed him to undertake his unusual Japanese venture. This is necessary because the

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<sup>3</sup> Those ballet entertainments were performed at the Alhambra, London. See: CARTER 2005<sup>A</sup>, pp.157-158.

<sup>4</sup> In some literature his surname is spelled as 'Rossi', but in all the related primary sources (in Italy, London and the USA), it is 'Rosi'.

<sup>5</sup> As Ueno has indicated (UENO 1992, p.2), several newspaper advertisements of Rosi's ballet school in the USA during the 1920s tell us that he was a graduate of the La Scala ballet school, for which there is no corroborative evidence.

<sup>6</sup> For brief and general references in English to Rosi's influence on Japan's theatres, see: GALLIANO 2002, p. 103; KANO 2008, p. 249; POWELL 1975, p. 82; and ID 2013, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> MASUI 1998, p. 27; and TANOKURA 2004, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> For Rosi as the 'founder' of western-styled popular music in Japan, see: MITSUI 2014, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> For discussions concerning cultural hybridization, see, for example: STOCKHAMMER 2011.

few articles concerning Rosi's early career were published in the field of dance studies and are highly speculative<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, their evidence is often anecdotal, and their 'conclusions' have hitherto not been examined or utilised by musicologists.

Tracing Rosi's early career in Italy has turned out to be difficult. This is because (1) his initial training is unclear as his name does not appear among pupils of the Scala Ballet school<sup>11</sup>; and (2) there seem to be several persons with similar names active during the 1880s and 90s, as Table 1 reveals: Giovanni Rosi, G.V. Rosi, Vittorio Rosi, and Giuseppe Rosi. In fact, Giuseppe Rosi must be a different person and could possibly be the father of our Rosi<sup>12</sup>. There still remains confusion, however, because Giovanni Rosi seems to have used 'Vittorio' as his first name at least during his early career. For example, in the printed libretto of *Rosa d'amore* (1899) – one of the ballets produced at La Scala in the 1898/99 season – his name appears as G. V. Rosi on one page and as Vittorio Rosi on another (MANZOTTI 1898, pp. III-IV). There is also another record demonstrating that Rosi was known as Vittorio in his youth. According to his own account<sup>13</sup>, the young Rosi made his debut as a dancer in 1884 by participating in a world-wide tour of an Italian opera company, visiting Java, Batavia, India, and Egypt before reaching South America where he played an extended engagement at Buenos Aires. A surviving printed libretto (entitled *Wanda*) associated with that Buenos Aires performance gives Rosi's name as 'V. Rosi' (SARACCO 1892, [p.1])<sup>14</sup>. In that production, the 'V. Rosi' performed the role of Ivan, a servant of the heroine, a minor role, perhaps suitable for someone's debut.

Despite some ambiguity, claims about Rosi abound, concerning his early career as a dancer and mime, and also his connections with La Scala. It has been possible to establish that in Italy he devised at least one ballet plot and choreographed it. The work was entitled *Eureka*, *Gran ballo Réclame*, and Rosi was in collaboration with the composer Romualdo Marengo (1841-1907), renowned for his earlier ballet music for *Excelsior* for La Scala in 1881 (choreographed by Luigi Manzotti). Rosi's plot synopsis for *Eureka* is very interesting. Set in a block of flats and offices in Milan, it unfolds a comical story regarding Tompson [sic.] and Cook (rival advertising agencies) and their mysterious neighbour Signora Réclame, who personifies the concept of Advertisement. It concludes with a somewhat allegorical finale where Réclame is worshipped by her followers including journalists and 'Advertising Geniuses'. Rosi himself explains in the preface:

*Eureka* is a *fin de siècle* ballet, a dance in which we hoped to present 'the Advertisement' in different forms, celebrating her unlimited power and her triumph, with choreographed scenes in the aim of advertising that to the world's major households<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> UENO 1992; ID. 1994; and YAMADA 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Rosi himself seems to have claimed that he studied under the renowned Italian ballet master, Enrico Cecchetti (1850-1928). (See: *Pasadena Community Playhouse News*, 1929, unpaginated; and KUSAKA 1976, pp. 149-150). Cecchetti made his debut as principal dancer in the 1870/71 season at La Scala before launching an internationally successful career (see: ASCARELLI 1979). He also performed at the Empire Music Hall in London periodically between 1888 and 1892. However, how, where and whether Rosi was taught by Cecchetti is unclear.

<sup>12</sup> Some records tell us that Rosi was from a dancer's family; in particular that his father (Giuseppe) was an instructor at La Scala (see: UENO 1992, p.2). However, there is no evidence in the La Scala archive for Giuseppe holding such a position. If the dancer called 'Giuseppe Rosi' who performed in *Le scarpette rosse* (1900) and *Sole e terra* (1901) was Rosi's father, he must have been already over 50 years of age at that time. However, for the former work, he may have been appointed particularly because of his age – the role assigned for him was 'Invalido' [an invalid person].

<sup>13</sup> Rosi's own recollection in: MATSUI 1926, p. 288; and *Pasadena Community Playhouse News* 1929.

<sup>14</sup> The ballet *Wanda* with Galleani's music was presented by different choreographers in Rome in 1892 and then in Parma in 1894.

<sup>15</sup> Two editions of the libretto survive: (ROSI [1900?]); and (ID. [1902?]). The preface is on Page 3 in both of the editions: «*Eureka* è un ballo fine di secolo, un ballo nel quale si è voluto estrinsecare la Réclame nelle diverse sue forme, magnificandone la sua illimitata potenza ed il suo trionfo, con scene coreografiche che hanno lo scopo di fare la reclame alle Case principali nel mondo...».

This ballet was an innovative venture challenging the traditional theatrical organisation and approach, and proposing what was to become the modern idea of a commercial 'sponsor' (Cf. FUSCO 2007, pp. 102-103). Rosi and Marengo attempted to put the work onto stage, funded by the Milanese company Gondrand through advertising sales. When it was about to be produced on the stage in 1901, however, the governor of Milan Giovanni Alfazio intervened, and the ballet was withdrawn<sup>16</sup>. The unsuccessful outcome of this forward-looking project may have prompted Rosi to look for a new land to pursue his career further. He did not give up the idea of 'commercial art', though. As we will see, later in his career, Rosi launched a unique business venture in London as well as putting on to the stage 'sponsored' productions in Japan.

## ROSI IN ENGLAND

The date and circumstances of Rosi's arrival in the UK are not clear. But since he was much involved in the *Eureka* project in Italy in 1901 and we have the first record of him in London in June 1902, he must have embarked in the UK some time in early 1902. The reason why Rosi chose to head for London seems understandable – the British capital attracted a stream of artists from abroad and gave them opportunities to succeed (CARTER 2005<sup>B</sup>, pp. 39-40). What is clear is that by June 1902 Rosi in London created a company which, in the days before advertising jingles, would agree to promote the products of businesses on the stage through dances which would illustrate and make vivid their attributes. *The Evening Telegraph* reports:

To present a ballet as a means of advertising all and sundry firms is certainly a novel and ingenious idea. However unique the project might be a clever Italian has managed to combine art with advertising, and has produced a ballet which would not disgrace – for beauty, elegance, and smartness – the stage of any London hall. A press representative had a chat with Signor Giovanni Rosi, who is introducing this scheme of advertising to this country, and found that he has laboured for three years over the preliminaries. His idea is to present a fantastic ballet in three acts and many tableaux which will serve as the medium for bringing the wares of certain firms to the notion of the public... (*The Evening Telegraph* (London), 24 June 1902, p.3).

It is surprising to observe how close Rosi's concept – clearly developed from, or directly based upon, his previous attempt, *Eureka* – is to that of modern-day television advertisements. Regrettably, however, we do not know how successful his venture turned out since we do not hear anything about his business after the report of the launch.

By January 1904, Rosi started working for the Alhambra Music Hall, at the Leicester Square, London<sup>17</sup>. The building of the Alhambra (in Moorish style hence the name) was originally constructed in 1854 (as the Royal Panopticon of Science and Arts) but reopened as a circus in 1856. Two years later, it was converted to, and licensed as, a music hall (GUEST 1992, pp. 12-13), and despite a fire in 1882, reopened, and continued to operate (*Ibidem*, p.33). In the course of its development, the Alhambra as well as its rival the Empire, once criticised as a haunt of prostitutes and a stealthy platform for inappropriate encounters between female performers and 'predatory' male clienteles, gradually 'legitimatised' their wares, and acquired more educated, middle-class audiences. Some members of the bourgeois audience (for example, the poet Arthur Symons) acted in their publications as a strong

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<sup>16</sup> (GARAVAGLIA 2008, pp. 107 and 193). Garavaglia seems to have believed that Marengo wrote the libretto of *Eureka* before assigned Rosi to choreograph the work (*Ibidem*, p.214) but this is a misunderstanding as both of the two editions of the libretto were published under Rosi's name.

<sup>17</sup> Rosi himself seems to have claimed that his arrival at the Alhambra was in 1902 (See: *PASADENA COMMUNITY PLAYHOUSE NEWS* 1929, unpaginated). As he was involved in the production of *All the Year Round* at the Alhambra (premiered in January 1904), he must have been active there in 1903. To be given the opportunity, he might well have started working there in late 1902.

apologist for the music hall. This is the process, as Faulk indicates, by which the 'middle class makes a sub-culture' (see: FAULK 2009, pp.23-49).

The main attraction of the Alhambra (as well as the Empire) was its *corps de ballet*. From the 1850s, when ballet became overshadowed by opera in London's mainstream theatres such as Her Majesty's, the music hall began to offer a viable platform for the genre as a form of spectacular entertainment. At the Alhambra, each evening's programme consisted of two large-scale ballets (CARTER 2005<sup>A</sup>, pp. 14-15). And before the Ballets Russes drastically changed the scene (by presenting their productions for the first time to British audiences at the very same Alhambra), it was the Italian style of ballet which was the centre of London's dancing activity. The Alhambra's connection with the Italian ballet tradition started as early as 1863 when the theatre engaged several principal dancers from La Scala (GUEST 1992, p. 13). Just before Rosi's arrival, it was Carlo Coppi (the former principal mime at La Scala) who was responsible for the choreography of the Alhambra ballet (CARTER 2005<sup>A</sup>, p.14). Thus, Rosi found himself at the theatre with quite a few compatriots including Lucia Cormani who joined the company in 1886. She excelled not only as a dancer herself but as an instructor. Later in her career, she not only drafted a detailed plan for a new dancing school in conjunction with the Alhambra in 1911 after the abolition of the original school in the previous year<sup>18</sup>, but also became a founding member of the Royal Academy of Dance (GUEST 1992, p. 53).

Furthermore, there was a particular practice in the Alhambra ballet which provided Rosi with a clue as to how to solve a problem that he would face later in Japan – the practice of 'travesty', with female dancers dressed as men. Rosi's future wife, Julia Reeve was one of the dancers famous for such roles at the Alhambra. Perhaps this made Rosi in Tokyo less hesitant to assign minor male roles to female singers in the face of the shortage of good male singers .

As already mentioned, Rosi made his Alhambra debut in January 1904 as a choreographer for a dance revue entitled *All the Year Round*. The work consists of a series of somewhat allegorical tableaux to «run the gamut of the calendar from January to December»<sup>19</sup>. For example, the January scene presents «the New Year impudently ordering his venerable predecessor off the premises while February brings its crowd of dainty maidens whose capture by a band of gallant swains plainly indicates the advent of St Valentine's day»<sup>20</sup>. The job of choreography was shared by Rosi, Lucia Cormani and Fred Farren<sup>21</sup>. Rosi contributed the greater part – the first (from January to March), fourth (June and July) and seventh (December) scenes – while Farren was responsible for the dances of trippers, flower girls and newsboys, and Cormani for those of swallows and mayflowers<sup>22</sup>. However, the surviving correspondence between the Alhambra director Alfred Moul and the composer of the work, James Glover<sup>23</sup>, seems to imply Rosi's appointment was a last-minute solution to the problems Glover experienced with Alfredo Curti, the theatre's main choreographer. Glover who wanted to produce a «modern ballet» found Curti proposing absolutely nothing new and making the production «gliding into a reproduction of what [Curti] called "la

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<sup>18</sup> Cormani's letter to the director of the Alhambra dated 4 August in 1911, currently in possession of: The Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections archives 75/5/1 .

<sup>19</sup> 'The Alhambra', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1904, unpaginated.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> Fred Farren (1874?-1956), the English dancer, choreographer, actor and producer, later became one of the principal male dancers at the Empire Music Hall.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> James (Jimmy) Glover (1861-1931), born in Dublin and trained in France, became the music director of many theatres in London including the Olympic (1882); the Empire (1883); the Palace (1893); and Drury Lane (1897). See: 'Obituary: Mr J. M. Glover', in: *Times* (London), 9 September 1931, p. 14.

mythologique" [sic.]»<sup>24</sup>. Nonetheless, this marked the beginning of Rosi's fruitful career at the Alhambra, as *All the Year Round* turned out to be popular and long-lived. This is due partially to the revue's adaptability – its subsequent productions were performed with topical news issues incorporated in some of the tableaux: Russia's preparation for the war against Japan was shown within the May 1904 production while the Macedonian/Bulgarian insurrection featured in the following month<sup>25</sup>.

After *All the Year Round*, Rosi was employed as a dancer as well as a choreographer in many productions at the Alhambra (See Table 2). Moreover, a stream of famous dancers from the Continent appeared as guest dancers on the Alhambra's stage and some danced with Rosi (for example, Anne Dancrey from France in the 1905 production of *La Maxixe*). Astonishingly, the Alhambra established a new theatrical vogue, which we might describe as 'dancing operas instead of singing them'. That was the method by which the theatre presented *Les cloches de Corneville*, an opera comique by Robert Planquette (1848-1903) where Rosi, in the role of the miser Gaspard, made a lasting impression. A review of the performance which appeared in *The Times London* in 1907 tells us that:

[Dancing an opera] saves trouble, for the intellectual effort involved in following a ballet compared with that of following an opera may be measured by inches instead of ells; it saves temper by eliminating that constant thorn in the flesh - the operatic tenor; it also saves time. For the ballet (like heat) is a mode of motion and covers ground quickly, so quickly, in fact, that four or five operas may with judicious treatment be clipped and trimmed and shorn of their excrescences and presented in a single evening... ('The Alhambra Theatre', *Times* (London), 8 October 1907. p.6).

Planquette's work, originally written for the Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques, Paris, in 1877 was already known by Londoners through its long-run London premiere in 1878 first at the Folly Theatre and transferred to the Globe Theatre with the title of *The Chimes of Normandy* (LETELLIER 2015, vol. I, p, 327). To revive a well-known opera in the form of ballet was not simply to «bring [the tunes] back to the lips» as the aforementioned *Times* review describes. It was some 'remedial practice' for ballet, now a declining genre. Already in 1894, George Bernard Shaw suggested:

The *danseuses* were still trying to give some freshness to the half-dozen pas of which every possible combination and permutation has been worn to death any time these hundred years... I wonder is there anything on earth as stupid as what I may call, in the Wagnerian terminology, 'absolute dancing'!... Surely it is clear by this time that if the ballet is to live, it must live through dramatic dancing and pantomime (SHAW 1981, vol. III, pp. 96-97).

It was an opera that gave to the Alhambra ballet the drama and the pretext for pantomime of which Shaw found it in need. Also, this practice of 'dancing and miming an opera' seems to have given to Rosi an important framework for his future work in Japan.

Working at the Alhambra enabled Rosi to gain a regular income. However, he was ambitious enough to seek further opportunities. It seems that with that in mind, during his stay in England he wrote the new ballet *Quo Vadis* with a plot derived from Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel with the same title<sup>26</sup>. The ballet book and plot synopses (manuscript and type-set copies in Italian, English and French) are surviving – rare primary sources for Rosi's choreography – together with the accompanying music written by a certain Sam Cudworth<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> James Glover's Letters to Alfred Moul dated 2 and 10 July 1903, currently in possession of: The Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections archives 75/6/16 .

<sup>25</sup> Unidentified newspaper clips (dated 17 May 1904 and June that year) in possession of The Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections archives: Theatre Box 'Alhambra'.

<sup>26</sup> Rosi spelled Sienkiewicz's name as 'Dienkiewicz' in the synopsis.

<sup>27</sup> No details are known about this composer. The only information I have gathered is that another work by Rosi and Cudworth (entitled *Marie de Crombille*) was performed in the Imperial Theatre, Tokyo in January 1913. Also I have found in the England censuses in 1891, 1901, and 1911 the record of a likely candidate for our Cudworth. That person was born in Stackstrade, Lancashire around 1880, and the 1901 and 1911 censuses describe him as a 'theatre musician'. He married Florence Williamson in February 1901 in London before the

Cudworth's music bears the dates of 1904 (in the piano score) and 1905 (in the orchestral version)<sup>28</sup>. Rosi himself seem to have been proud of this work. Later in 1919, interviewed by an American journalist, he listed it as one of his best works (WARNACK 1919)<sup>29</sup>. However, there seems no record of a performance of this work – either in England or in Japan.

By 1910, Rosi left the Alhambra and became a freelancer. For the England and Wales census for the following year, he proudly put his occupation as 'theatre artist' while being a destitute lodger to a restaurateur in Soho. At the beginning of 1910, Rosi formed his own company, and with a ballet entitled *Uncle Isadore*, toured in the north of England – Liverpool and Birmingham in January<sup>30</sup>; Manchester in February<sup>31</sup>; and Leicester, Leeds and Sheffield in March<sup>32</sup>. The troupe presented some notable dancing by two ballerinas Luisa Patti and Carlotta Mossetti directly from La Scala – so it was claimed, even though Mossetti had already appeared in the Alhambra in the previous year (GUEST 1992, p. 154). Apparently, their performance included the so-called 'apache dance', a dance representing a violent exchange between a pimp and a prostitute. Two years previously, Fred Farren – Rosi's colleague for *All the Year Round* – with Beatrice Collyer had created a sensation with a similar dance for *A Day in Paris* in the Empire Music Hall (CARTER 2005<sup>A</sup>, p. 36). According to Rosi's own claim, his company became so successful that they even toured Germany in the following year (*Pasadena Community Playhouse News* 1929; and UENO 1992, p. 8).

The autumn of 1910 saw Rosi back in London, participating in a couple of productions in the Empire, the Alhambra's rival hall. In one of the productions (*The Faun* choreographed by Farren with the music by the English composer Dora Bright) Rosi danced with Lydia Kyasht and, in the other (*The Dancing Master* also by Farren with the music by Cuthbert Clarke), appeared as a last-minute stand-in for Adolph Bolm. Kyasht and Bolm were, as Guest put it, «the vanguard of what was very soon to become a veritable invasion of Russian dancers» (1992, p. 136). It was precisely by those Russian dancers that the scene of ballet and dancing in London was about change completely.

Many aspects of what Rosi experienced in London prepared him for the challenges that he was to encounter in Japan: dealing with relentless pressure of performing on the stage on a constant basis; seeking commercial success; and casting flexibly by using travesty roles where necessary. But above all, he learnt in the music hall in London that 'opera' could serve to provide a dramatic context for gestural communication of ballet and mime. From such a perspective, the real forte of opera – the power of singing – became only of secondary importance. He was unaware of the problems this would lead to in Japan.

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couple moved back to Bacup, Lancashire in order to live (temporarily?) with Samuel's parents. In 1911, the couple together with two daughters was living at 11 Denman Road, Peckham, London. This Cudworth seems to have been a kind of music prodigy, as at the age of 11, he was awarded as a violinist a silver medal at a music contest in Burnley, Lancashire (see: *Burnley Express*, 24 January 1891, p.1). In London, he may have been a member of the Alhambra orchestra and become acquainted with Rosi. No detailed records of the Alhambra orchestra members survive.

<sup>28</sup> The *Quo Vadis* Ballet Collection in the Performing Arts Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>29</sup> During the same interview, Rosi mentioned another work by himself, *The Discovery of America by Columbus*, and the libretto of that work was eventually published (ROSI 1932). A copy is currently in the possession of the Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, Germany.

<sup>30</sup> 'Liverpool', *The Stage* (London), 13 January 1910, p. 3; and 'Advertisements', *The Stage* (London), 27 January 1910, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> 'Theatres and Music Halls', *The Manchester Courier*, 12 February 1910, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> 'Advertisements: Leicester', *The Stage* (London), 3 March 1910, p.10; 'Advertisements: Leeds', *The Stage* (London), 10 March, p. 10; and 'Local Amusements', *The Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* (Sheffield), 29 March 1910, p. 11.

## ROSI IN JAPAN

In the autumn of 1911, Rosi began to work as a choreographer at His Majesty's theatre under the direction of Sir Herbert Draper Beerbohm Tree<sup>33</sup>. It was in that theatre during the spring of 1912 that Rosi was recruited as the director for the Western Opera department of the Imperial Theatre, Tokyo, by Keinosuke Nishino<sup>34</sup>, the Vice Manager of that theatre (MATSUI 1926, pp. 274-275, and UENO 1992, p.8).

The Imperial Theatre, inaugurated in March 1911, was in fact a privately run theatre (despite its grand name), but, as Japan's first western-style theatre, it was nonetheless symbolic and significant for 'modern Japan' and for its cultural ambitions<sup>35</sup>. The Theatre's founding committee was headed by Hirofumi Ito (1841-1909), the first prime minister of the country<sup>36</sup>, and included many prominent figures in the fields of politics and business. They established the foremost aim of the theatre as that of introducing Japan's cultural achievements to foreign countries. However, it also was important for aspects of the theatre to be western in style (in terms of its interior and exterior as well as its programmes and running system), a secondary aim obviously with potential to be in conflict with the first. In any case, the western style decor helped to set the Imperial Theatre apart from other Japanese theatres from the pre-modern era, which were mere tents with no chairs but rugs on the ground and showed often indecorous programmes (MINE 1996, pp. 144-146).

From the very beginning, even prior to Rosi's arrival, western music was very important in the Imperial Theatre. In September 1910, six months before the opening, the Theatre invited applicants from the Japanese public to join its newly formed western-style orchestra. The members offered places included complete beginners and were put into training under the German instrumentalists August Junker (violinist, 1868-1944) and Heinrich Werkmeister (cellist, 1883-1936), both of whom were professors at Tokyo Ongakugakko [the Tokyo Music School, now Tokyo University of the Arts] from 1899 and 1907 respectively. The Tokyo Music School was set up by the Japanese Government in 1890 as the country's first conservatoire of western-style music. In fact, in July 1903, a group of students at that music school put on to the stage the first operatic production in Japan – a Japanese translation of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. However, the Ministry of Education then forbade any more operatic productions at the state-run school lest opera encourage indecorous behaviour. This ban at the state-run school was not lifted until 1951 (MINE 1996, p.242-244).

Under the circumstances, opera performance went into 'privatisation', and the Imperial Theatre became the most notable centre, setting up an opera department within a year of the inauguration. Members for the Opera Department were also chosen from public applications, similarly to the orchestra. The Department commenced in October 1911 with the premiere of *Kocho no mai* [Dances of butterflies], Werkmeister's original 'opera' with a libretto in the Japanese language (which more accurately ought to be described as a staged choral work with dances). In December of that year, the Department presented a concert with an excerpt from Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* sung by Tamaki Miura (1884-1946) and Adolfo Sarcoli (1867-1936). Miura was a graduate of the Tokyo Music School, who, after studying further in Europe, enjoyed international recognition as Japan's first soprano, and the Italian tenor

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<sup>33</sup> For Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (between September 5 and 13 December 1911); Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* (between 19 December 1911 and 17 February 1912); and Shakespeare's *Othello* (between 9 April and 18 May 1912) (see: WEARING, 2014, pp. 99, 117 and 136).

<sup>34</sup> A newspaper criticises Nishino's visit to Europe as his flight from the Theatre's contractual problems with some of the actors. See: 'Engei fubun roku', *Asahi newspaper* (Tokyo), 24 January 1912, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> For the history of the Imperial Theatre, see: MINE 1996.

<sup>36</sup> Ito was assassinated in China in 1909; therefore did not live to see the opening of the theatre.



Sarcoli found his shelter in Japan fleeing from the Xinhai Revolution in China where he was touring (MINE 1996, p.248). This was Japan's second encounter with genuine Italian operatic singing after a concert by Maria Palmieri (1840-1890) and her sister, Alice Persiani at the Gete za hall [the Gaiety Theatre], Yokohama in 1875 (MIZUTANI 2014, p.1)<sup>37</sup>. After the Miura/Sarcoli concert, however, the Imperial Theatre focused on creating original musico-theatrical works in the Japanese language, but this led to utterly disastrous outcomes.

It was into this situation of patchy and intermittent cross-cultural contact that Rosi was about to arrive. Some report that Rosi was exultant about the prospect of working in such a prestigious theatre (TANOKURA 2004, p. 41; MINE 1996, p. 1). However, his real feelings do not seem to have been quite that positive. There is a surviving but hitherto unnoticed letter by Rosi himself dated 7 July 1912, written only a month before the Italian's arrival in Japan. He addressed Henry William Woodford, the licensee of the Alhambra Theatre as follows:

Dear Sir,

I am writing to ask you to be kind enough to do me a favour. You being the only person now at the Alhambra who knows me, will you do your best to recommend me as ballet master to the new directors, and use your best endeavours to give the position for me. Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully, G. V. Rosi<sup>38</sup>.

His petition for a position at the Alhambra seems to have been to no avail, and he must have left for Japan almost immediately after this letter. In August 1912, the *Miyako* newspaper in Tokyo announced his – perhaps rather despondent – arrival:

... Mr Nishino, the former Senior Managing Director of the Imperial Theatre, during his business trip to Europe, has contracted with the Italian Signor Rosi for the next two years as the dance master. Rosi was Ballet Master in the Alhambra as well as in the Empire, London, teaching ballet to English dancers. He is sure to arrive at Shimbashi [the station in Tokyo] at 8:30pm today (*Miyako Newspaper* (Tokyo), 6 August 1912, p. 3).

Between his arrival at, and departure from, the Imperial Theatre, Rosi was so active that the number of productions in which he was involved (within and outside that theatre) reaches over forty (See Table 3). The first work, for which he took the initiative in the Imperial Theatre is called *Gisei* [Sacrifice]. It is set in Egypt and was fashioned by Rosi in what became known as the *mugongeki* genre – a non-verbal theatre with mimed gestures. This was the first example of that genre ever produced in Japan. It was put on to the stage during the October 1912 season for the Imperial Theatre, as the playbill shows (See ILL. II), and was programmed for one evening together with four Japanese plays<sup>39</sup>. The mixture of Japanese and English scripts in the playbill indicates that the theatre targeted both Japanese and foreign audiences, as Tokyo saw an increase of foreign residents particularly from 1899 when restrictions on their residence and commercial activities within Japan were terminated (Cf: MCOMIE 2006, p.470).

It is significant that Rosi's initial work for Japan was a mime-drama, because this not only shows his artistic pedigree (he trained as a mime in Italy) but also is suggestive of his educational belief. He strongly believed in the conventional system of mimetic gesticulation. It is reported that when Rosi was coaching opera singers in the Imperial Theatre, he strictly taught them:

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<sup>37</sup> Born in London and trained in Italy, Maria Palmieri had a successful career as a dramatic soprano, singing in many prestigious opera houses including La Scala, San Carlo (Naples) and the Théâtre-Italien in Paris. We do not know much about her sister Alice Persiani. They were on a world tour in 1875-6, visiting, after Japan, Melbourne, Australia, New York and Philadelphia in the USA. See: 'The New Prime Donne', in *Australasian Sketcher* (Melbourne), 21 March 1876, p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> Rosi's letter currently in the possession of The Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections archives, 75/6/29.

<sup>39</sup> They were two contemporary plays (*Heikegani* by Kido Okamoto and *Kokkyo* by Kikutei Taguchi) and another two traditional works based upon Kabuki – Japan's indigenous music theatre (*Kanatehon chushingura* and *Mukashimoyo Matsunishirafuji*).

...to press the chest by the right hand to represent 'listen to me'; to raise both of the hands (with the left slightly higher than the right) and make the fingers tremble for 'oh, God!'; and to make a greeting 'ladies and gentlemen' with open arms towards the audience. Also, when entering the stage to pause, they are instructed to put the leg nearer to the audience slightly back by two *suns*<sup>40</sup>. In this way, they can avoid standing sideways on the stage or showing their back towards the audience (MATSUMOTO 1966, p. 551).

It is interesting to consider Rosi's methodology in relation to the change which the realm of choreography in Europe was about to undergo at that time. The stylised and conventionalised system of gesticulation in ballet where each gesture was designated a fixed meaning was soon to be replaced by a more naturalistic approach where the meaning of each sign should be defined in the musico-dramatic context where it appears. As this new gestural approach developed, it not only blurred the dichotomy between ballet and mime, but eventually found its way into the new, burgeoning genre of silent film (GARAFOLA 2005, pp. 67-68). At first glance, Rosi seems to have been unaware of the new trend. However, his emphasis on formulaic gesture may have been due to Japanese actors/singers' lack of fundamental skills as well as their inferior physiques (Cf: NODA 2011, p.6). Rosi was not given enough time to set up an effective training system but was expected to devise appealing productions straight away. He had to make the cast learn through its stage appearances and this led to many make-shift compromises. However, he seems to have undertaken the task willingly – or maybe with faked willingness. During an interview immediately after his arrival, Rosi declared:

I will make Japanese students excellent dancers within six months. Usually, we start to train a future professional around the age of eight and go through all the *kata* [formulae], taking 18 months or so. Although many students with me here are quite mature, I will do my best to complete my task successfully (*Jijishincho*, 7 August 1912, p. 7).

The Japanese audience, however, received Rosi's miming drama with very little enthusiasm. They were rather puzzled by the genre, and what interested them most was the titillating eroticism provided by the actresses (particularly the curvaceous Julia Reeve, Mrs Rosi) wearing see-through costumes and often revealing their thighs (HANGONKO 1912, p. 46), as well as the colourful visual aspects such as the lighting, props and backdrop paintings (*Waseda bungaku* 1912). The Japanese dislike of Rosi's formulaic movements was strongly expressed when Rosi choreographed the Dance of the Seven Veils for a production of Oscar Wild's *Salome* by the Geijutsu za company in the Imperial Theatre in December 1913. Upon the failure of the production, a newspaper critic pointed the finger almost solely at Rosi:

The Dance of the Seven Veils by Sumako<sup>41</sup> was just poorly performed. How 'poor' [sic<sup>42</sup>] her physique was! Her bony shoulders, thin arms, flat chest... It was just disgusting (not only ethically) when the King tried to embrace her in the middle of her dance. Perhaps this is not the fault of the company but that of Signor Rosi, who taught her the *kata* [formulae] ('Salome hyo' in: *Asahi Newspaper* (Tokyo), 6 December 1912, p.7).

This review upset the short-tempered Italian. He could not help justifying himself by sending a letter to the newspaper.

It was only two weeks before the premiere that I was first contacted to choreograph *Salome*. As you may know, the play was the most difficult of the difficult. Actors considered as the best in Europe might hesitate to undertake the role of Salome, and even I who have been working as a dancing master for the past 15 years find the Dance of the Seven Veils most challenging. When approached, I almost refused the offer, as it seemed but a vain hope that Miss Matsui would be able to perform the role after only 14 rehearsals. I strived to make this clear. However, the plan had been already settled; I only did my best. From the beginning it was just inevitable that the production would end up a failure. If I am allowed to be honest, Matsui's poise and gestures are not up to Europe's standard. This may be likened to the fact that I, an expert in ballet would be

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<sup>40</sup> *Sun* is Japan's archaic system of measuring lengths. 2 *suns* equal to 6.0606 centimetres.

<sup>41</sup> Sumako Masui (1886-1919), one of the best singer-actors at that time. For Masui, see: POWELL 2002, pp. 29-31.

<sup>42</sup> The critique used the English word here.

considered a laughing stock when it comes to Japanese traditional dancing.... (*Asahi Newspaper* (Tokyo), 17 December 1912, p. 7).

Rosi's apologia seems reasonable. However, it incited Hogetsu Shimamura, the director of the Geijutsu za company to publish in the same newspaper three successive columns on the matter (SHIMAMURA 1912<sup>A-C</sup>). Shimamura's main aim was to defend the quality of the production but, in passing, he did not forget to deplore Rosi's attitude to blame his pupil when it was his 'formulae' that were criticised (SHIMAMURA 1912<sup>C</sup>), and to insinuate that Rosi was somewhat induced to do so by some malicious third party for their own benefit (SHIMAMURA 1912<sup>A</sup>). Rosi's disposition (especially his short-temperedness often shown during rehearsals) created some distance between him and the Japanese and this incident was the beginning of many. A month after this, the newspaper reported a spiteful anecdote about the relationship between Rosi and the props department of the Imperial Theatre:

A while ago, Rosi again complained about the work of the department. When the staff said to him, with courteous bows, 'You, cretin; if you were Japanese, we would have knocked you down ages ago', the Italian, who did not understand a word of Japanese, triumphantly replied 'thank you, thank you!'...('Engei fubun roku', *Asahi newspaper* (Tokyo), 24 January 1913, p. 7).

Rosi's failure to construct a friendly working relationship with the Japanese may have been rooted in the differences between their protocols. While Rosi could not help expressing his anger and frustration outwardly, the Japanese tended to perform their '*menju fukuhai*' (pretending to obey someone but secretly refusing to do so). Their dislike of the Italian would not be noticed by him until the situation became out of hand.

Although Rosi was originally appointed as Ballet Master for the Opera Department of the Imperial, by the time his initial 2-year contract was renewed, his remit was something similar to that of the director. Even if he himself never trained as a singer nor a musician, he seems to have supervised all the aspects of opera productions there, although he never actually took the baton as a conductor. Rosi made notable gains at the expense of the orchestra director, Werkmeister and a certain Mrs Bezold, who taught singing at the theatre (KOBAYASHI 1919, p.102). The main repertoire that Rosi chose for the Imperial Theatre consists of 'light' works: an operetta rather than a fully fledged opera; a dance revue rather than a classical ballet presentation. When presenting a pre-existing work, it was translated into the Japanese language and was often abridged (although Planquette's *Le cloches de Corneville* was performed with almost no cuts in March 1915). Those decisions were made not only because of the rather low standard of Japanese performers at that time – in particular, it is reported that the Japanese struggled to perform recitatives (MORI 2013, p. 159) – but also because of Rosi's own artistic tastes. To Rosi, 'opera' meant what he mimed and danced with his colleagues at London's musical halls. That was his niche and even undertrained Japanese singers might be able to cope with it. Moreover, the Imperial, which, prior to Rosi's arrival, had focused upon creating original musico-theatrical works in the Japanese language, willingly accepted the directional change under Rosi's instruction. This is because they found the unpretentious nature of the light repertoire more commercially promising. In 1914, the Imperial re-organized the Opera and Orchestral departments into one 'Western Drama' department to focus upon works of lighter vein (MINE 1996, p. 257).

Among the original revues Rosi produced in the Imperial, of utmost interest is *Mitsukoshi gofukuten gangu bu* [The Toy Department of the Mitsukoshi Store]. With the generic subtitle 'fantastical ballet', it was premiered on 1 February 1915. Set in Mitsukoshi, Japan's first department store, the work unfolds a number of scenes where dolls of various different nations come to life and dance in the store at midnight<sup>43</sup>. The Mitsukoshi Store put an advertisement in the programme pamphlet of the Imperial Theatre from 1913 on. Perhaps it was only natural for the Imperial to put onto the stage an item related to Mitsukoshi and

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<sup>43</sup> The programme of the Imperial Theatre for the February 1913 season.

that must have matched only too well Rosi's shrewd commercial sense that he had cultivated through his earlier years in Italy as well as in England<sup>44</sup>. However, this is not only about their commercial tie-up. Both the Mitsukoshi Store and the Imperial Theatre at that time functioned as key venues for Japan's modernisation. I have already discussed the politico-cultural agendas behind the Imperial Theatre. Mitsukoshi, on the other hand, by not only selling goods of Western design and/or of Western taste but also by holding numerous exhibitions about more advanced lifestyles of the West, promoted images of the West not as exotic but as something of the future to which Japan might aspire (TAMARI 2006). This was much in keeping with what the Japanese government was aiming. Mitsukoshi displayed 'aestheticised' western-style everyday life in a somewhat theatrical manner, and, between 1909 and 1925 possessed even its own orchestra formed by 20 - 30 boys with western instruments (who were trained by army band members) in order to promote the 'dream life' (SAEGUSA 2004). The advertising slogan of 'kyo wa Teigeki ashita wa Mitsukoshi' [today, visit to the Imperial, tomorrow Mitsukoshi], which Mitsukoshi devised for the Imperial Theatre pamphlet provided a powerful symbol of the 'westernisation' of Japan.

The Western Drama department of the Imperial Theatre, however, struggled to gain support from the audience. For connoisseurs who had directly witnessed the practices in the West (in particular those under the Wagnerian spell), the Imperial productions were not «serious enough and showed no sign of searching attitudes» (TATAEISEI 1913, p. 49), while for ordinary Japanese people they were incomprehensible and nonsensical, subject to laughter and booing. As a result, the Imperial found itself in terrible financial difficulty, and, in May 1916, the management team decided not to renew Rosi's contract any further and moreover disbanded its Western Drama department.

Rosi seems to have sensed beforehand that his job was at stake. By the time he faced the termination of his contract, he had already set off to work in order to organise his own company – Japan's first opera-comique theatre. Already at the beginning of 1916, a newspaper reported his plan to refurbish the Engi-za (a small theatre in the district of Akasaka in Tokyo) in modern western style for the capacity of 700 people. In the newspaper's interview, Rosi explained:

What I am aiming at is to make the theatre a stylish sociable space for music lovers. I will choose only non-offensive and decorous works. In exchange, I may become selective when it comes to my audiences, although I will offer discounted tickets for students in official uniforms. Although there are quite a few people who like musical dramas, so far there has been no theatre specialising in opera. That is what I should like to open. My theatre will have no financial aid; it will run purely independently, solely by the sale of tickets. However, I would not force any member of the cast to take responsibility for selling tickets! ('Seiyo fu no opera: Rosi no keikaku', *Asahi Newspaper* (Tokyo), 17 January 1916, p. 7).

His plan was realised, although, owing to various difficulties, the venue had to be transferred elsewhere. Rosi's company, 'Rosi's Opera Comique', found the home in the Banzai-kan (a former cinema hall) also in the Akasaka district, refurbished and renamed now as 'the Royal Theatre' (KONO 1918<sup>A</sup>, p.30). The company commenced on 25 September 1916 with a press preview of Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*<sup>45</sup>. Even after the preview, however, Rosi had further legal difficulties to overcome. The police would not accept the Royal Theatre as a legitimate theatre, and it was given merely the status of a show tent. Moreover, under the 'Engeki torishimari kisoku' [Entertainment Control Act] (issued first in 1900) all show tents had to open their business by showing some Japanese traditional entertainment; Rosi in haste summoned

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<sup>44</sup> Rosi's commercial sense is also shown by that he wrote and produced a 'sponsored' *opera comique* entitled *Moeru mizu* [Burning Water] for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Nippon Oil Corporation on 5 May 1917. For that production, see: MASUI 2003, p. 112.

<sup>45</sup> 'Rosi shi no hataage', *Asahi Newspaper* (Tokyo), 26 September 1916, p. 5

the *kodanshi* [story-teller] Fukoku Hosokawa for a makeshift opening act (KONO 1918<sup>A</sup>, pp. 30-31). Furthermore, later (in November of that year) the police temporarily closed the Royal Theatre after banning costume plays in show tents. Eventually the theatre was allowed to continue as an exception but only after the company changed its name into 'Rosi's Opera'. This is because the word 'comique' was considered to bear an indecorous connotation, as those forbidden plays at huts were collectively called 'musume comique [sic]' [girls' comique] (MIZUTANI 2014, p. 8).

At first with his own company, Rosi continued to present light operas in Japanese translations. In particular, *Les cloches de Corneville* had a great success in July 1917, and Rosi himself appeared there as Gaspard, his stock-in-trade role (even though his use of a prompter for the Japanese words was severely criticized since it was taken to indicate his laziness and lack of artistic conscience). However, the success was down mainly to the young tenor Rikizo Taya (1899-1988) who sang the role of Jean Grenicheux (See ILL. III). Taya, initially trained as an instrumentalist in the Mitsukoshi orchestra impressed the audience (as well as Rosi when he auditioned for the company) by his natural tenor voice, rare in Japan.

Eventually, Rosi's company attempted more serious repertoire. In October of 1917, they presented Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* in the original Italian language. The production received a glowing review, finally pleasing long frustrated connoisseurs of opera (KONO 1918<sup>B</sup>, p.37). For the first time after the inauguration of the Royal Theatre, they performed in front of sell-out audiences. Also, Rosi who had previously been notorious for abridging operatic works, began producing each work almost in its full version. For example, an examination of a surviving copy of the printed libretto for his production of *La traviata* (premiered on 2 February 1918)<sup>46</sup>, in comparison to the Italian original, demonstrates that Rosi's version is simply a faithful Japanese translation of Verdi's work with a very few minor cuts (such as the chorus section of 'Brindisi' in Act I and the second verse of Gastone's 'Matador' song in Act II).

However, the *Cavalleria rusticana* production marked the zenith of the company's success, and it now began to decline. Many members of the cast and staff, one by one, rebelled and walked off. Some could not stand Rosi's strict teaching method combined with his Latin temperament, while others could no longer make ends meet, being unpaid for a long time. The company was financially ill-managed and in deep trouble, unrectifiable by one or two hit productions. While they were producing Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia* in November 1917, a heated argument between Rosi and the music director (called Ishikawa) developed into a physical fight, resulting in the resignation of the director. After that season, Aiyu Kobayashi, the libretto translator, terminated his services due to Rosi's breach of contract. In the following month, the prima donna Nobuko Hara quit the company (KONO 1918<sup>B</sup>, p.38).

Worse still, some other 'operatic' companies set up in the Asakusa region in Tokyo (an area famous for working-class entertainment), focusing more on the entertainment side of musical theatre, and they began to gain more success than Rosi's company. Earlier in September 1916, Tokuko Takagi who Rosi briefly taught at the Imperial Theatre founded the Kabugeki Kyokai [the Association for Song-&-Dance Dramas] in Asakusa and their inaugural performance in January in the following year marked a phenomenal success. Takagi's venture is now considered to constitute the birth of what is called 'Asakusa opera' despite its roots in the activities of Rosi (NAKANO 2016). Many similar companies followed Takagi's, including the Tokyo

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<sup>46</sup> (KOMATSU 1917). A copy is currently in the possession of the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University. Reproduced in: NAKANO 2013.

Kageki-za company, which was inaugurated in October 1917 at the Nihon-za Hall – Japan's first permanent theatre specialising in opera. Baku Ishii, one of the founders of the Tokyo Kageki-za, was also taught by Rosi at the Imperial Theatre. The 'runaways' from Rosi's company eventually settled in those companies. Ironically, Rosi had simply given crucial basic training to his future commercial rivals. In 1918 within the season of *La traviata*, Rosi finally decided close the company and to leave Japan for San Francisco. His planned departure for the US with very few people seeing him off was delayed. His passport was confiscated because the soprano Nobuko Hara sued Rosi for financial misconduct as well as theft of her scores (*Miyako newspaper*, 27 February 1917, p.3; and MATSUI 1926, pp. 288).

#### ROSI, MUSIC THEATRE AND THE WESTERNISATION OF MODERN JAPAN

Later in 1919, during an interview for an American magazine, Rosi commented upon his 'fruitless years' in Japan:

The Japanese are rotten pupils. They can't do it - they are not ready. Even Yamamoto, managing director at the Imperial admits that his people are not yet prepared to take up the art of terpsichore. I was a fool to try to 'civilize' them. They are a wonderful people but their ideas and ideals are exactly opposite from European in art. For one thing they are too – what shall I say? – repressed in tragedy; they are comic. In comedy, they are too serious. They are a wonderful people but – impossible, impossible (WARNACK 1919).

Rosi's failure may have been a result of his own mistakes. Firstly, his plans were far beyond his capacity. It is simply incredible that no one (neither Rosi himself, critical reviewers, or his rebellious pupils) was concerned about his lack of proper musical training. He was by training a dancer and choreographer, not capable of giving his students vocal tuition. They seem to have been left with their natural voices or had to take private lessons elsewhere<sup>47</sup>. Secondly, the art of mime where his expertise lay was not as universally communicative as he seems to have believed. His work faced cultural barriers, when presented to Japanese audiences who were equipped with different associations and experiences. Thirdly, Rosi's financial conduct for his company was unconscionable. He may have shown some business acumen earlier in his career, but he had no training in managing an opera company. He set the ticket price for his company uncompromisingly high: the box for four ¥16.00; the first class seat ¥3.00; the second ¥2.00; and the third ¥1.00<sup>48</sup>. This price range was almost the same as that in the Imperial Theatre, which targeted the wealthiest of Japanese audiences<sup>49</sup>, and it was when the average annual income of the Japanese middle-class was only ¥1592.00 (KOYAMA 2007, p. 109). The high pricing may have been due to Rosi's inflated sense of self-worth, but it cost him his career in Japan when he had to compete with Asakusa opera companies that offered operatic entertainments for pennies. Some reported that Rosi went bankrupt owing to the failure of his venture (MATSUI 1926, p. 278), while others with malice spread the rumour that Rosi hid his wealth refusing to pay his debts and begging money from many people before the departure (KONO 1918<sup>c</sup>, p.39).

Fourthly and perhaps most importantly, Rosi was not fully aware of the complexity of the cultural landscape of his audience in Japan. At that time, there was a desire among Japanese intellectuals to establish a 'national musical theatre' under the strong influence of Wagnerian ideals. Such an expectation was particularly strongly expressed and supported by the cultural agenda of the Japanese government at that time, who identified 'modernization'

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<sup>47</sup> Nobuko Hara and Rikozo Taya (the principal singers of Rosi's company) had private tuition with Sarcoli who was residing in Japan from 1911 (Cf: Naoe 2010, p.47).

<sup>48</sup> 'Seiyo fu no opera: Rosi no keikaku', *Asahi Newspaper* (Tokyo), 17 January 1917, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> The price range for the Imperial Theatre in 1914 was: the special seat ¥2.50; the first ¥2.00; and the third ¥1.50. See: 'Teigeki', *Asahi newspaper* (Tokyo), 30 November 1914, p.7.

with 'westernization' both economically and culturally. This may be comparable to the situations of many European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century, which strived to establish their own 'national' theatres (Cf. THER 2014).

The late 19th-century European cultural 'war' over Wagnerian also found its echoes in Japan. Already the year 1896 saw a heated debate between two renowned authors – Ogai Mori (1862-1922) and Bin Ueda (1874-1916) – over Wagner's treatment of recitative, and by the turn of the twentieth century, Wagner became something of a vogue in Japanese academia (AZUMA 2013, pp. 371-375) with several authors writing on various aspects of Wagner's musical dramas. Among them, of importance was Shoyo Tsubouchi (1859-1935), who, after studying English translations of Wagner's writings, published not only his vision for Japan's national music theatre (TSUBOUCHI 1904) but also put it into practice by producing *Shinkyoku Urashima*, a libretto for a brand-new, experimental music-theatrical genre, a mixture of Japanese traditional music and western style music (the work was premiered in February 1906). However, the foremost problem here is that almost none of those Japanese academics who discussed Wagner had very little (if any) practical experience of western style music and very few had directly witnessed performances in the West. Even the musical knowledge possessed by Tsubouchi was very poor (YASUDA 1999, p. 2). Aspirations may have been high, but no one was capable of providing a detailed foundation for the achievement of their goals.

Wagner aside, Japanese knowledge about European musical theatre in general was limited. Some accounts of opera were written in Japanese but no one offered a comprehensive history of the genre, and no one seems to have understood the differences (historical, formal, stylistic and socio-cultural) between one sub-genre and another in European musical theatre. *Gendai no kageki* [Modern Opera], an opera guidebook by Aiyu Kobayashi (the libretto-translator for Rosi's productions), even though it was published in 1919 after Rosi's departure, demonstrates the somewhat simplistic view of opera that prevailed in Japan. Kobayashi divided the genre into two large categories, based solely upon the general nature of the plots: 'opera seria' (synonymous with, he understood, grand opera in French and *grosse Oper* in German) and 'opera buffa' (*opera comique* in French and *Operette* or *Singspiel* in German) with occasional references to 'opera semiseria' and Wagner's 'Musik Drama' (KOBAYASHI 1919, pp. 5-11). Thus, Kobayashi listed as examples of 'opera buffas' Suppe's *Boccaccio* (a Viennese *operette*) and Planquette's *Les cloches de Corneville* (a Parisian opera comique) which the Japanese came to know well by that time<sup>50</sup>.

Kobayashi seems to have believed that all musico-theatrical works should be treated equally as viable artworks of the western classic canon, and to some extent Japanese theatre goers shared his view since they hence desired to experience European musico-theatrical works in their full artistic dress. To them, Rosi – who shortened «Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*, the West's 'classic' of all times» (MITAKA 1914) or inserted '*chari*' [impromptu banter] in operettas (KONO 1918<sup>B</sup>, p. 37) – was almost a blasphemer. No one at that time seems to have been fully aware of a subtle rupture between what the Japanese hoped to see in Rosi (a supposed master of musical theatre and an elitist symbol of the grandeur of the West) and what he really was (a purveyor of middle-class musical theatre and entertainment). And Rosi, perhaps arrogantly believing his technical foundations to be applicable for any form of musical theatre, did not realise the width of that gap, either.

However, something of importance came from what Rosi described as his 'impossible' encounter. Soon after Rosi's departure, under the climate of the burgeoning populist culture in

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<sup>50</sup> The reasons for Kobayashi's confusion seem to include: (1) he consulted mainly English literature – e.g. Arthur Elson's *A Critical History of Opera* (1901) (where the word 'operetta' is limited to mean 'a little opera' and 'Comic opera' covers all light-hearted works regardless of the countries of origins) and William F. Apthorp's *The Opera Past and Present: a Historical Sketch* (1901) (which treats 'operetta' and 'Singspiel' interchangeably); and (2) he was a literary scholar, not equipped with musical literacy to conduct a musico-stylistic analysis.

Japan, the Asakusa Opera, now directed by Rosi's rebellious pupils, not only established a notable popularity among the general populace but also gradually gained recognition from Japanese literati. This phenomenon – the bourgeois acceptance of formerly working-class entertainment – is in part comparable to what London's music halls (including the Alhambra and the Empire where Rosi once worked) experienced (Cf. FAULK 2009). However, it is noteworthy that in Japan the populist Asakusa opera underwent this process without the proper establishment or rivalry of its elitist counterpart. Thus, the product of an interplay between high and low artforms (such as parody or satire), which forms an integral part of European musical theatre, was never properly developed there.

What was presented in Asakusa may not have been as technically professional as Rosi had hoped but it nonetheless amounted to an appealing marriage of the artful and the accessible. Moreover, the Asakusa opera became an acceptable portal into Japan's theatrical and musical culture and a melting pot of entertainments both high and low. For example, Kenichi Enomoto (1904-1970), the renowned comedian extolled as King of Japanese Comedy during the 1930s and 40s<sup>51</sup>, made his debut as a chorus member in an Asakusa production of Bizet's *Carmen* in 1922. Trained by an opera company, Enomoto developed a wide range of musical repertoire including opera and operetta numbers. And from Enomoto and other Asakusa trained popular entertainers, many items such as 'Holde Schöne, hör diese Töne' and 'Hab ich nur deine Liebe' (from Franz von Suppè's *Boccaccio*), 'La donna è mobile' (from Verdi's *Rigoletto*) and 'Voyez sur cette roche' (from Daniel Auber's *Fra Diavolo*), with colloquial Japanese translations, were inherited by Japanese comedians and are still sung to the present day.

Roughly a century after Rosi's departure, his legacy may not be found easily in modern-day Japan. The New National Theatre, inaugurated in 1997, produces operas and ballets but largely by the European cast in the original European languages. Japan, in the end, may have failed in establishing their own 'National Musical Theatre' which Tsubouchi and others ardently desired. However, Japan's initial encounter with western musical theatre through Rosi left a lasting legacy, which can be seen more clearly in the sub-culture level. For example, the Takarazuka Kageki, a phenomenally popular musical company was founded in 1913 as one of the few companies with all the female cast under the strong influence of Rosi's work in Tokyo, and still continues that practice<sup>52</sup>. It is a mark of Rosi's achievement that, following an enormous earthquake in the Tokyo Region in 1923 which destroyed along with everything else all the theatres, his theatrical practices managed to survive. The productions of Rosi and his followers may not have been a genuine representation of musical theatre in the West, but neither was it simply a shabby imitation of a grander western tradition. Rather they should be considered as viable attempts at syncultural construction. This view not only enables us to gain a different perspective on cross-cultural encounters, but also raises new questions regarding the 'meaning' of Western musical theatre in relation to its 'global' status. As musical theatre with an origin in Europe is transformed and its style becomes detached from its origin, it is able to create hybrid genres and new social uses.

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<sup>51</sup> For Enomoto's career at its height, see: BASKETT 2008, pp. 59-63.

<sup>52</sup> For Rosi as a mentor for the Takarazuka Girls Musical Company, see: DOMENIG 1998, pp. 272-273; and ROBERTSON 1998, p. 60.