

# The Reluctant Masquerade

Music & libretto by James Stevens

*“This is my opera THE RELUCTANT MASQUERADE based on the personality of Yukio Mishima, the gifted Japanese writer who killed himself in an exhibitionistic act of seppuku.”*

The Japanese have a concept of the outside and the inside of human personality, that which is shown to the world as opposed to the real inside person. This is known as *tatamae* and *honne*, or disparagingly aware (the Japanese always know how to have your cake whilst eating it) *omote* and *ura*. The person who demonstrates this dichotomy in extremis was the great post-war writer/actor Yukio Mishima.

To all intents and purposes he was a successful public figure with a beautiful wife and a happy family, but at heart he was a homosexual who deplored the state of contemporary Japan and begged for the restoration of earlier ideals. At the same time he suddenly realised his homosexuality when he saw the night-soil man emptying the buckets, his biceps vividly in view. From then on he had to live two lives. Hence the title of this work. He ran his own private little army to "bring back the glory of the Emperor".

In his last tetralogy, "The Sea of Fertility", he demonstrates all his contradictions. He adopted the Buddhist ethic with its acceptance of reincarnation as a basis for the ongoing narrative, which brings into consideration the nature of time.

He planned a final show-down at the Eastern Army Headquarters on November 25th, 1970. This work opens at the point where, having delivered the last pages of his tetralogy to his publisher, he has the general tied up to a chair with the crowd bellowing outside. It goes on to suggest the Buddha shedding tears for the state of the world and finally the problem of the central character in his last work (Satoko, reformed prostitute, now Mother Superior) confronted with the problem who she is really in love with, the characters in the book or the author, which brings up the question of the nature of time.

## PART ONE - SEPPUKU AND LULLABY

*Mishima is upstage, back to audience, on balcony beyond open doors of General Kanetoshi Mashita's office - arms raised, addressing soldiers (out of shot) on parade ground below. The General is strapped to a chair. Some members of Tatenokai (Mishima's tiny private army) in attendance.*

There is a babble of voices off (taped) - idiot, aho, arsehole, tonma, bakayaro, motherfucker, kuso, shitbag, orokamono. Babble gradually subsides.

**Mishima:** (music agitato - voice barked out).

Listen - for chrisake listen  
Listen ... listen, listen, listen you fools.  
Give the emperor his due  
Restore his godliness  
Tenno haika banzai *(Long live the emperor)*  
Nippon no tame ni shinou. *(Let us die for Japan)*  
Who will come with me?  
Does nobody care?

How to bring back the glory  
Of shaping one's own death?  
There is a sublimity about the invasion  
Of human flesh by lovingly tempered steel *(One Japanese sword is honed and polished, moulded and sharpened for months by its craftsman/creator)*  
Wielded by one's own hand.  
I will die by the sword.

Fools out there! FOOLS!  
Tenno haika banzai.  
Long live the emperor.

(Calmato).

Obaasan! Obaasan! *(Grandmother, the person who possessed Mishima till age twelve)*  
Your hunting eyes haunt me  
Down the long years;  
I remember you, combing your hair;  
You smothered my childhood fears  
from threats out there.

So innocent a babe, so frail,  
So anxious and pale.

(Agitato)

Tenno haika banzai.  
General, no harm will come to you

If you do as I say.  
Sign, sign, sign my ultimatum.

No compromises.  
Tenno haika banzai!  
The honour of the nation is at stake.

Nippon no tame ni shinou.  
Who will come with me?  
Tenno haika ni keirei.

*(I salute the emperor)*

(Calmato)

All was still in the garden  
The garden of Gesshuji's;  
The noonday sun drained it  
Of all memories.  
Was I really there  
All those years ago?  
And the abbess who comes to greet me  
Are those the eyes I used to know?

*(This is the temple which  
Honda, the central character  
in Mishima's monumental tetra-  
logy, "The Sea of Fertility",  
returns to in old age seeking  
his lost love)*

Where did the dream go wrong?

(Agitato)

The time is very near  
The time to greet my death  
The death I have always lived for.

We have come a long way  
My dear young friends  
On the road to eternity.

Listen to them out there!  
They don't know the meaning of love.  
Without love there is no glory.

(Long pause)

There is no glory without the love of friends.

(Pause)

Morita, my own private samurai  
Once I have bared the fundoshi  
And dragged the dagger across my belly  
Do not leave me in agony.  
Despatch me speedily  
Finish me off with a loving  
Coup de grace.  
Quickly, quickly ... quickly....

(Calmato)

It isn't face, it isn't race  
What is it that I look back upon?  
There is a sound of stillness  
Creeps through the din  
Of trucks and trains and cars and planes.

It may be bells or wishing wells  
And bluebirds in' the tangerine sky.  
The cherry blossom flutters  
Deep in the mind's eye  
Like a butterfly - oh why?

A man said to me, "What will you be?  
Poor man or rich grandee?"  
Doesn't make any difference -  
How do I find satori?

My father sat and smoked his pipe  
And girininjo coloured me true.  
I have an aching hunger.  
What will the days  
Of absence from my childhood do?

My mother used to pour the tea  
Whilst neighbours gossiped over the cups.  
A single lotus blossom  
Hung from the ikebana on the yellow wall.

The wooden shoes I used to wear  
Ring in my ears like chinchirorin.  
Beyond the paper panels  
Seven tatami where I used to sit and dream.

A man said to me "What will you be?  
Holy man, soldier, thief?"  
Iki helps every man to see.  
Why do I cry with grief?

A kimino with printed flowers  
Is all a-flutter on scented breeze.  
The pretty girl who wore it  
Stirs through my thoughts  
And comes to see me constantly.

Where did the dream go wrong?

(agitato)

**Mishima** (spoken, out of character - or **commentator**):

It was by now just after midday, November twenty-five, nineteen-seventy. Mishima stripped off his clothes leaving only the sparkling white fundoshi embracing his loins. He spoke to Morita, his lover and first lieutenant who was to behead him after the disembowelling. "Are you ready?" He took the yoroidoshi, (a short dagger), and after a final forlorn "Tenno Haika Banzai", he knelt down and pressed a finger against his abdomen, the body he had honed to perfection. Then, where the finger left its imprint on the luscious tawny flesh and using all his strength, he drove home the dagger. With a cry of immense pain he fell forward on to his own spilling entrails. Thus Morita swung his sword but missed the neck. Twice more he struck and missed, slashing Mishima's back to ribbons. Furu-Koga, the expert swordsman, grabbed the weapon and skilfully severed Mishima's head from his body. He then performed the same service for Morita who had feebly attempted to follow his master's example. The other students, forming his private little army, stood the heads, with the hachimaki still encircling their foreheads, upright on the bloodstained carpet. Then they offered up a silent buddhist prayer. Trussed to his chair, General Mashita looked on helplessly. The police arrived. The "incident" was over. It was twelve twenty-three.

**Natsuko** (his grandmother):

[*This is lush 'Broadway'*]

Daytime, night-time, summer, winter -  
Here am I  
Wrapped in crevices of time  
And watching people slowly passing by.

Awake time, dream time, always, never  
What am I to do  
Held between the covers of a book  
And hoping some day someone somewhere takes a look  
And doesn't say goodbye.

How can somebody like me debate -  
Making do, never sure  
Trying to make sure  
My efforts do not come too late.

Some time, no time, will he ever  
Come out alive?  
If he comes through with the piece of his heart  
Entangled in a web of semi-consciousness,  
Will he survive?

How can I be sure that what I plan  
Will work out? Still I doubt

That I'll ever help  
This boychild grow into a man.

Sometime, no time, will he ever  
Come out alive?  
If he comes through with the pieces of his heart  
Entangled in a web of semiconsciousness  
Will he survive?  
Will he survive?

PART TWO: THE BUDDHA WEEPS.

## PART THREE: SATAKA'S SONG.

(Satoko no kakyoku).

*Satoko, now the eighty-three year-old mother-superior of the convent at Gesshuji, is alone on stage. Honda/Mishima has been to see her and asked about the intervening years but she disclaims all knowledge of her earlier life and the lovers who destroyed her. She has come to terms with reality by turning her back on it whereas Mishima has done it by constructing an armour-plated façade behind which he can hide. These are the ways human-beings in their frailty try to contend with the brutal truths of. Life which they otherwise cannot face.*

*In this epilogue she questions both her own isolation and the eternal awesome conundrums of existence. But at the end of her soliloquy the defence of a lifetime drops away and for a few seconds she is devastated by the knowledge that in her attempt to find security she has lost the most important thing in her life.*

### **SATOKO'S SONG.** (Satoko no kakyoku).

It all took place so long ago  
Yet I remember it all so well  
As though it were yesterday  
Or a mere millennium since.  
But, I wonder, was it real,  
Or like water pearls on an emerald leaf  
In a dew-dappled dawn  
That are gone by noon?  
Perhaps I imagined it all.

Amo ergo sum  
I love therefore I am.  
I loved not wisely nor too well;  
First the pale and haughty Kiyooki;  
He drifts like a pallid phantom  
Wanly across the retina  
Of the mind's eye.

I retired from life  
All those years ago  
When - so young - he left the world.  
But did he really exist?

And was he also the handsome  
Fearless and fanatic Isao  
The young idealist who killed himself  
Chasing a hopelessly wrong-headed dream?  
Was it the same life throbbing through his veins?  
Or was it all a vision? The same, or another ghost?

Then I remember the bright  
And calculating Toru;  
The streetwise, scheming, heartless Toru -

The peacock's cry that disappeared into the night,  
The serpent that bit the hand - Yes, I remember Toru.

How should I recognise  
The clue to continuity?  
Was it all a slick mirage  
Just an elusive silhouette?

Finally there was the petite Ying Chan  
In the silken swaddling clothes  
As becomes a princess.  
The same life revitalised ... was it?  
Was it?  
Or just a heartless game  
Played by an enigmatic god?

(I am lost as are we all  
In the interces of time;  
And was there someone had a fall  
From grace; and were that fall "sublime?)

Wars came, and hurt, and strife  
People suffered beyond all care;  
But what did I do with my life?  
Just fled from personal despair.

That old man who came  
To greet me yesterday  
With sadness in his eyes -  
Did he really linger thus  
With all these youthful progeny?

And was he really here  
Or did he just think he was?  
Did he really live  
Or was he a phenomenon  
In the laboratory of the mind?

This brief history...  
A long time ago the world begun -  
At least, that's what they say;  
But could you touch it, taste it or tape it?  
Or was it just an inspiration,  
Compensation ... life gone dead.  
And were the images that seemed  
So real, just shadows that we dreamed?  
Were we counting timeless sheep  
To round this life in cosmic sleep?

(Long pause)

And is death an end or a beginning?

(Long pause)

Those figures from beyond the past -  
Why did you leave me so soon -  
All those years ago  
When I retired from life?  
Was it sixty years ago  
Or simply sixty seconds?  
What's the difference? It's all the same  
It's all a figment of the imagination  
Compensation for a life gone dead.

Is it possible that these four  
Were one and the same blood?  
Is that the answer to it all -  
That life and time are one continuum  
With no beginning and no end -  
A mighty machine of which we're the tiniest cogs?  
MUST time have a stop?  
And when did it ever start?  
I don't suppose we'll ever know  
What it's all about;  
The most we can ever hope for is peace  
In our waning years.  
For the rest it must remain  
An unsolved conundrum.

Amo ergo sum.  
Without love there is nothing -  
There is nothing without love.  
I love therefore I am.

(Long pause)

Father - it was none of them -  
None of them I loved.

Yukio - you were the only one -  
The only one I loved.  
Yukio, Yukio, Yukio.  
You loved not wisely but too well  
Not wisely but too well  
Too well... too well... too well.

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