

Significance of Production of and Characteristics of Performance of Yeonwoo Stage's Original Musicals

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Abstract. Yeonwoo Stage started as a theatrical troupe performing original musicals for small-sized theaters. However, if Yeonwoo Stage continues its research and development of the narrative and music of musicals by developing and improving its performance depending on the purpose and scale and attracting empathy from more people, Yeonwoo Stage would be able to emerge as the model theatrical troupe in the original musical field. Yeonwoo Stage's musicals clearly show that narrative (story) and music (song) never function 'alone' but always function in the context of discourse and convey the meaning through the interaction between music and its interpreters and the interaction between text and context.

Keywords: Yeonwoo Stage, Original Musicals for Small-Sized Theaters, *Oh! While You Were Sleeping*, *Ah! My Goddess*, *Adolescence*

1 Introduction

During the late period of the crisis/transition period (October 1992 ~ October 2006), Yeonwoo Stage firmly established the planning and production system led by a producer (In-Su Yu) and introduced the season-based system (i.e. broadened repertoire) by performing the musical *Oh! While You Were Sleeping* as a performance of "Yeonwoo Stage 53 (Season 1)" and "Special Performance 14 (Season 2)" (from December 2005). During the challenge/advancement period (January 2007 ~), *Oh! While You Were Sleeping* became a representative musical of Yeonwoo Stage. Since then, Yeonwoo Stage has led the performance of repertoire up to date (Seasons 26 and 27; September 4, 2015 ~ February 28, 2016; Art Madang 3 on Daehangno). Following *Oh! While You Were Sleeping*, Yeonwoo Stage continued its efforts to broaden its repertoire by developing and performing other musicals, including *Ah! My Goddess* (January 2013 ~) and *Adolescence* (November 2014 ~). Yeonwoo Stage, which has

almost 40 years of “tradition” to focus on uncommercial original play and “uniqueness” characterized by Korean-style narrative and collective creation, has recently begun to focus on commercial musicals after a series of crises so as to follow the trend of the times and seek popular empathy. As a result, however, Yeonwoo Stage faced fierce competition in the original musical market, which is led by small-sized theaters, and the risks of closure of its small-sized theaters and breakup of theatrical troupe. In this regard, Yeonwoo Stage’s selection and concentration strategy reflects the trend of the times.

2 Significance of Production of Yeonwoo Stage’s Musicals

Yeonwoo Stage first watched *Oh! While You Were Sleeping* when Yeonwoo Stage was to change its *dongin-je* system (the “joint production and operation system” in Korean) into the producer system (i.e. planning and production system). Back then, Yeonwoo Stage, which had insisted on collective creation as a small-sized theater, realized that it could not operate a theatrical troupe with a small number of successful works. Even at those times, however, while focusing on popular narrative and emotional aesthetics for the sake of broadened repertoire, Yeonwoo Stage tried to preserve its tradition and unique characteristics, i.e. “development of Korean-style narrative” and “succession of collective creation culture.” This is why Yeonwoo Stage’s producer (In-Su Yu) embraced a newly-emerging writer and director from Drama School of Korea National University of Arts (Yu-Jeong Chang) and dramaturgy (Seo-Hui Ye) and operated the planning and production system through a close cooperation between the insiders and outsiders of the theatrical troupe. Some consider *Oh! While You Were Sleeping*, *Ah! My Goddess* and *Adolescence* not as the works of Yeonwoo Stage, but as the work of Yu-Jeong Chang (playwriter) and Hye-Seong Kim (composer), the work of Jeong-Seok Han (playwriter) and Seon-Yeong Lee (composer) and the work of Hui-Jun Lee (playwriter) and Jeong-Ah Park (composer), respectively. However, it should be noted that the current plays, musicals, etc. performed mostly in small-sized theaters are influenced by the audience instead of the charisma of a theatrical troupe. If Yeonwoo Stage continues to perform original musicals successfully and develops the culture of watching performance based on the combination of its own planning and production and newly-emerging creators’ talent and passion, Yeonwoo Stage’s planning and production system would be able to be recognized as a model case of original musicals of this time.

3 Characteristics of Performance of Yeonwoo Stage’s Original Musicals: Narrative Characteristics and Musical Effect

Yeonwoo Stage’s musicals clearly show that “narrative (story) and music (song) never function ‘alone’ but always function in the context of discourse and convey the meaning through the interaction between music and its interpreters and the interaction between text and context,” as explained in greater detail below[1].

First, *Oh! While You Were Sleeping* consists of a constituent event (nucleus), “the missing of Byeong-Ho Choi” and a supplementary event (catalyst), “the life stories of characters.” Narrative and musical number established by the missing story and the life story gives rise to a twist in the conclusion with the techniques of “concealment” and “bias.” The “life story” intermediates the missing story as a “narrative discourse,” but highlights the aspects of truth, meaning, emotion and intention by creating a single common story through the multiplicity of main characters. “Concealment” in a narrative arouses curiosity and conveys the implied truth, while “bias” in a narrative causes a surprise and conveys the implied meaning. And “concealment” in music offers a pleasant experience and evokes a dramatic emotion, while “bias” in music heightens expectations and delivers intention. This reversal technique based on concealment and bias leads characters to inner growth and contributes to the creation of a bond of sympathy with the audience[2].

Second, *Ah! My Goddess* has impressive narrative structure including a “narrative as a discourse,” a “narrative as a story” and a “narrative by narrator”: in a narrative as a discourse, North and South Korean soldiers make friendship; in a narrative by a narrator, main characters (including Sun-ho, Seok-gu, Ju-hwa, Chang-seop and Dong-hyeon) appear in the outer story and narrate the inner story of characters (including Dong-hyeon, Goddess and Seok-gu) within the frame of a play within a play; and in a narrative as a story, reality and fantasy intersect by the appearance of the “Goddess.” This narrative structure contributes largely to 1) the character formation of space, 2) the strategic minimization of the stage, 3) the multiplicity of main characters, 4) the repetition of similar life story, and 5) the flexible change of a point of view. And the musical number serves as dramatic functions such as 1) pursuing the multiplicity of characters, 2) maximizing the effect of the expression of tragic feelings, 3) drawing audience’s interest by irony and fantasy, 4) evoking the nostalgia for delicate feelings and pure wishes, and 5) ordinary female characters’ playing the role of healing and salvation, thereby contributing to the reconstruction of reality and the style of fantasy[3].

Third, *Adolescence* offers a frame narrative wherein the frame and the inside consists of a single story. In musical *Adolescence*, the diegesis narrative constitutes a story about the adolescence of Yeong-Min, while the metadiegesis narrative constitutes a story about the adolescence of Yeong-Min and his friends. In *Adolescence*, as the frame and inside of narrative form an organic relationship, so do the diegesis narrative and the metadiegesis narrative. Other than main characters (i.e. Yeong-Min, Seon-Kyu and Su-Hui), five minor characters show unique character and also play the role of the older generation and fictitious characters, uttering narrated discourse and imitated discourse, either directly or indirectly, and crossing the boundary of reality and virtual reality. During this process, message, representation, intent, etc. are delivered. Musical *Adolescence* is an auditory combination of narrative and music. Musical numbers of *Adolescence* consist of solo and ensemble representing the uniqueness of Yeong-Min and chorus representing the universality of the adolescents of these days. Among the musical numbers, reprise constitutes the narrated and imitated discourse of the adolescents at their puberty (mostly, Yeong-Min, Seon-Kyu and Su-Hui) and contains feeling as the “form of emotion.” Such discourse and fantasy intensify a dramatic effect. In addition, Musical *Adolescence*, which is a visual combination of narrative,

motion and design, achieves the effect of synesthetic expression through a crossover[4].

The above-mentioned musical effect of the musical number of Yeonwoo Stage is shown “only when its value is realized, i.e. only when the text or script (musical note) is deemed significant or intriguing[5].” Of course, it would be more accurate to say that “the meaning of the musical number is not reproduced but created during the performance[6].” When the musical number “contributes to the progress of a story, the description of characters and the supplementation and consistency of lines (dialogues), the musical is deemed well-made[7].”

4 Conclusion

It is deemed that the narratives of Yeonwoo Stage’s original musicals have established, changed and strengthened the foregoing characteristics depending on the purpose of performance (e.g. *Oh! While You Were Sleeping*: development of small-sized theaters and reversal technique; *Ah! My Goddess*: fantasy, spectacle and One-Source-Multiple-Use (OSMU); *Adolescence*: intermediality and psychoanalysis) and the size of target theaters (e.g. *Oh! While You Were Sleeping*: small-sized theaters; *Ah! My Goddess*: medium and large-sized theaters; *Adolescence*: medium-sized theaters).

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