

**LET US PRODUCE REVOLUTIONARY OPERAS THAT ARE HIGH IN
IDEOLOGICAL AND**

Talk to Officials in the Field of Art and Literature
October 28, 1971

Last August I listened to a tape recording of the opera produced by the People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble, portraying the nurse An Yong Ae, and spoke to the people concerned about a few problems arising in the production of revolutionary operas. Today's performance has shown much improvement compared to the one I listened to before. The work seems to be a success.

The opera has a general framework and contains many fine songs. The songs by the pangchang are good. Their melodies are gentle, sweet and emotional. The composition of the Song of Blood Transfusion and Red Devotion of a Nurse, sung by the pangchang, is excellent. The melody of Red Devotion of a Nurse is fascinating. These are precisely the type of songs that our people want. Songs in operas must be based strictly on national patterns, as these are. In addition, the songs by the pangchang. Soldiers Are Immensely Happy, Stars, Too, Emit Flashes of Love, Is There No Way to Save the Life of a Comrade-in-Arms? and A Light Is Seen at a Window of a Ward at the Front are very good.

There is also some fine singing by the characters. We Will Always Remember Our Friendship Wherever We Go, If Only You Stay Beside Us, I'll Reflect the General's Bright Rays and Pleasure, Songs and Laughter Come by Themselves, for instance, are well written. And We Will Always Remember Our Friendship Wherever We Go suits the character of the People's Army extremely well. In the scene in which this song is sung the audience is drawn into the dramatic excitement. All the songs sung by soldiers of the People's Army should be like this one.

The orchestral music is also good. The music in the style of a ballad is well played on Western instruments, which shows that we are quite able to perform on Western instruments in such a way that it accords with our people's feelings and emotions. For the People's Army Song and Dance Ensemble to have subordinated Western musical instruments to Korean music is a great success.

As yet, however, this opera has not been constructed properly in terms of its drama, and the principle of producing a Sea of Blood-type opera has not been applied to its content and form. This opera should be made dramatically flawless and the principle of creating a Sea of Blood-type opera should be applied to it so as to develop it into an excellent revolutionary opera of this kind, high in ideological and artistic value.

In the first place, the line of reverence for the great leader should be strong.

Accurately portraying in artistic and literary works the unfailing loyalty of our people and soldiers to the great leader Comrade Kim Il Sung is of great significance in establishing the Party's monolithic ideological system solidly among them and training them to be true revolutionaries of the leader. Creative workers should make efforts to portray this loyalty truthfully and profoundly in works of art and literature.

In order to depict such loyalty in a profound way in this opera, it is necessary to portray the noble spiritual world of the heroine, who believed in and followed him with a single heart and rendered devoted service to him. This can be done by establishing a sub-plot that illustrates the heroine's reverence for him. Holding him in reverence and fighting for him were very real to our People's Army during the Fatherland Liberation War. During that war they always revered him and fought for him, even at the cost of their lives. This opera should take as its central idea the life of the People's Army soldiers who put their faith in and followed him alone and served him faithfully with a single heart, and portray their life in depth. Only then can the opera become a fine work in which the monolithic ideological system of the Party is firmly established.

However, this opera does not have a plot-line of reverence for the great leader. Although the lyrics contain some aspect of high regard for him, the veneration for him does not run through the whole work. When we produced the film *The Story of a Nurse*, we spoke of the failure to include the line of reverence for the leader as being most regrettable. The same mistake was made in the opera, because the film was adapted to the stage without any changes.

The opera should be bold enough to go beyond the limits of the film and depict strong worship for the leader.

For a vivid depiction of this, it is essential to make the line run through the whole work and clearly portray the heroine as revering the leader, particularly in the scene in the ward on Mt. Thaebaek. For the opera to grip the audience, it is imperative in this scene to portray in depth the spiritual world of the heroine who longs for the leader and adores him.

However, because the scene on Mt. Thaebaek has been adapted without alteration from the film *The Story of a Nurse*, the opera lacks the line of reverence for the leader and, accordingly, fails to impress the people. On the stage the actress weeps in anguish, but the audience does not. For this to happen means that the scene has not been a success. If the scene in the ward on Mt. Thaebaek is not portrayed well, this opera will not prove successful. In the revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood*, the scene in which Ul Nam died was depicted well artistically, so it gripped the audience and the work became more brilliant.

During Mt. Thaebaek episode you should include an extra scene in which the heroine shows her veneration for the General and ensure that it is high in artistic value. If you wish to make the scene a success, you should portray the earnest feelings of the heroine as she reveres the General, and not confine yourselves to showing only her

anguish in the deserted ward on Mt. Thaebaek, as you do at present. What I recommend for this scene is for the young heroine Kang Yon Ok to reach the deserted ward on Mt. Thaebaek, having braved every manner of hardship, only to find dark rocks; for the pangchang to express the dramatic situation; and for the heroine to show her irritation in a song, then utter, longing for the General, '°Where is the General now?± and '°How heartsore he must feel to see me weeping!± and finally sing a song the content of which is '°Where Is the General?± Through this song of worship for the General, you should show the pure and beautiful mental world of the heroine who trusts in, follows and reveres him alone. I myself will try to write the lyrics for the heroine's song of reverence for the General. For a further vivid depiction of the line of reverence for the great leader in this work, you should create and present a scene in which the heroine dreams of meeting the General at the Supreme Headquarters. I think it would be a good idea to include the dream in the scene in which she takes a nap at the end of part one and to have the heroine speak about and sing the song of reverence for the leader after she wakes up. This will put life into the personality of the heroine, who adores and follows the leader, awake or asleep, and strengthen the line of reverence for him.

For a yet more vivid depiction of the line of reverence for the great leader, it is imperative that the scene in which Kang Yon Ok dies be effective.

In this scene you should skilfully depict the heroic act of Kang Yon Ok who, after running into the blazing ward through a hail of machine-gun bullets, carries her revolutionary comrade-in-arms out on her back, saves his life by stopping the enemy bullet with her own body and thus she dedicates her beautiful youth willingly. You must do this to show in depth the noble spiritual world of the heroine who trusts in and follows the great leader with a single heart and lives and fights for him every moment. You can improve the opera by building up the heroine's feelings of reverence for the leader in the first half of the opera, and in the last scene, in which she dies a heroic death on the battlefield, by making her utter her desire to see the General after asking that her Party membership fee and card be given to the Party Central Committee.

You should make the scene in which the heroine dies more tragic. You seem to be worrying about doing so for fear that it might run counter to our Party's aesthetic thought, but there is no problem if you stress revolutionary tragedy. It is only by emphasizing tragedy at this point that you can inflame people with the spirit of revenge against the enemy and make them weep. After the heroine dies, having spoken her last words about her desire to see the General, the song '°I'll Live Forever in the Care of the Leader should be sung. More of the lines of this song should be sung in a nasal tone to give vent to the soldiers' anger.

You should add a stanza to the song Let's Be Loyal to the Leader Down Through the Generations, sung by soldiers of the People's Army in the final scene of the storming, praising the exploits of the

heroine who devoted herself single-heartedly to the great leader. The words of the song may be written to the following effect: Kang Yon Ok has left us but her desire will come true in her homeland, and millions of revolutionaries will advance in her footsteps.

You should portray life truthfully in this opera.

Portraying life truthfully is the lifeblood of works of art and literature based on socialist realism. There can be no ideological quality or artistic value in works of art and literature that are not a part of real life.

However, this opera contains many instances of the lives of characters not being depicted truthfully.

When the heroine goes to a village in the south to obtain rice and sees a US soldier committing outrages against an old man there, she shoots him dead. This is not realistic. Earlier in the opera when Myong Ho, while on his way back to the rear, sees US soldiers coming northwards and rushes to attack them, unable to suppress his desire for revenge, the heroine holds him in check. How can she act in such an inconsistent way? Moreover, the heroine herself witnesses Party members criticizing him for his violation of discipline at a Party meeting. So, her action is not reasonable. If she shoots the US soldier she will be unable to leave the village, where the enemy is swarming. You should not have Kang Yon Ok shoot a US soldier dead in that scene. Instead you should show the anguish of the heroine who is unable to fire her rifle, even though she is witnessing such outrages committed by the enemy; the scene should also contain the south Korean people fighting staunchly in observance of their revolutionary principles, despite the tyranny of the enemy. This is enough.

You have made some young men and a 'peace keeping corps' member appear in the scene in a village in the south, but this does not accord with historical facts. During the Fatherland Liberation War all the young people in the south were drafted into the puppet army or joined the Volunteers' Corps, and therefore only women and old people remained in the villages. There was no 'peace keeping corps' in the south. You should not ignore historical facts. Making the 'peace keeping corps' member appear in this opera is not important because doing so does not accord with the plot. In the revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood* there is a sub-plot involving a reactionary village head, so it is fine for a village head to appear frequently. But the opera in question does not have a plot-line dealing with the 'peace keeping corps', so there is no need for it to appear. In the scene in a village in the south you should replace the 'peace keeping corps' member with a puppet-army soldier.

The scene in which the heroine meets the wounded soldiers after returning with the rice she has obtained should also be realistic. The heroine is made to look out for wounded men after returning, but this scene should not be designed in such a way. The men must not remain seated after waking and reading her letter. You should not make the heroine look for wounded soldiers, but instead make them wander about in search of her and express their feelings in song when they meet her. Only then can you portray life truthfully and show

their loyalty to their revolutionary comrade.

Next, you should make the libretto more poetic, touch up the melodies and improve the presentation of the songs.

In operas, whose basic medium of portrayal is songs and music, the songs should be good. Good songs can draw the audience into the heart of the drama.

If you are to write good songs you should first poeticize their lyrics. If you fail to do so you cannot rouse the composers to produce the kind of sweet music that leads to well-known songs. Fine lyrics are essential for famous songs. You should not write lyrics by exchanging suffixes; you should in all respects make them perfect poems that carry the full idea of the dialogue and yet are meaningful. You should set good melodies to the libretto after it has been rendered poetic. The melodies in operas should be sweet and gentle. Our people are fond of all that is sweet, gentle and elegant.

However, this opera includes many songs whose words have not been poeticized and which do not have fine melodies. If we examine the poor songs, we realize that there has been a failure to eliminate elements of the recitative in the words and melodies. Among such songs there are Let's Fight Together and Go Together and Where Is the Ward on Mt. Thaebaek?. Their melodies are no good because their lyrics are not poetic. The words of these songs should be made a little more poetic and their melodies altered. The melody of Let's Fight Together and Go Together should be heartrending and that of Where Is the Ward on Mt. Thaebaek? pathetic and tearful. These songs are sung by the heroine, so their melodies should be the best. Only then can they highlight the suffering personality of the heroine and grip the audience.

You should work on the lyrics and melodies of the songs Why Can't the Woman Soldier Speak? and We've Followed One Road of Loyalty. The first half of these melodies is reasonably good but the second half is not.

You should examine the other songs and rewrite those with poor lyrics and melodies. You should see to it that all composers write a song each, and choose the best song, as if in a competition.

In operas there should be as few spoken words as possible and a great deal of singing. An opera made up of a great deal of dialogue cannot be called an opera. The dialogue should be turned as much as possible into lyrics to be sung.

However, this opera still contains a great deal of dialogue, which could quite easily be converted into lyrics for singing instead of remaining as speech and narration. One instance of this is the reading of Ki Chang's letter. In this scene the content of his letter should be put into lyrics and expressed by the pangchang through a solo. If this is done when the heroine reads it, the moment of the heroine's entering into an illusion will become more distinct and the dramatic arrangement will be better.

In operas you should make good use of the pangchang.

Our introduction of the pangchang into operas is a new discovery in the history of the opera.

The great leader has said that our country is the homeland of the pangchang in opera. Foreigners, too, speak highly of us, claiming that our introduction of the pangchang is an operatic revolution. Indeed, the introduction of the pangchang in the form of stanzaic songs into operas is unique in opera history and represents the opening up of an entirely new field for operatic dramaturgy. In the future, too, we should make good use of the pangchang, and develop it so as to enrich the operatic art of Juche.

What is important in employing the pangchang in operas is to make it fit the action and the progress of the drama. The pangchang in operas reflects the dramatic situation and the spiritual world of the characters and is an instrument for developing the drama. Therefore, it should be dovetailed with the action and the progress of the drama.

In this opera, however, the pangchang is not geared to the action on the stage and its forms are not diverse. You should ensure that it is properly geared to the stage action and widen the variety of its forms to suit the dramatic situation. The pangchang may be sung by small or large ensembles first before being followed by a solo. This solo could be turned again into small or large ensembles or a chorus. The pangchang group may sing after a solo sung by a character on the stage and the character on the stage may sing after the pangchang. The number of people in the pangchang should be increased slightly. The number in the men's pangchang is small, so it is not as effective as it could be.

You should add one stanza to each song in the important scenes in the opera. It is only if the songs are made a little longer that prominence can be given to the personalities of the characters and the dramatic feeling be preserved and sustained.

In the scene in which the wounded soldiers go to the hospital, in the rear, Ki Chang's song 'Oh, a Fire Burns in Our Minds' should be lengthened by a stanza. This will make it possible to show better the intricate mental world of the wounded soldiers who are to be sent to the home front, and to build up towards the moment of their attempt to fight against the enemy in the following scene, in which the enemy rushes north.

You should add one stanza each to the Song of Blood Transfusion and Stars, Too, Emit Flashes of Love, which are sung by the pangchang. Because these excellent songs are each only a stanza long at present, these songs touch the audience initially but end quickly before the audience is carried away by the emotional content of the songs. You should add a stanza to each of these songs and so further highlight the noble spiritual world of the heroine, enabling the audience to appreciate the songs properly.

In the opera you should repeat the good stanzaic songs at important points. In this way you will bring the characters to life and build up and develop their feelings. You should write good theme songs and repeat them in important dramatic scenes so that the process of the development of the heroine's personality and her spiritual world are shown in depth.

In this opera the orchestral music should also be played as skillfully

as possible, for doing so will show up the brilliance of the opera. However, the orchestral music in some scenes is not arranged well, and its performance is not good. The music in the scene of the dream is not arranged well as a whole, although the first and last parts are fairly good. That in the scene of the bombing is not melodious; it has no strength. In operas the orchestral music should excel in both arrangement and performance.

Artists should be talented both in singing and acting.

In operas good melodies are not sufficient; songs should be performed well to suit the emotional content of the music. If artists fail to perform songs effectively, they will also fail to stir up feelings and to keep the personalities of the characters alive.

In particular those playing the heroes or heroines should improve their singing performances.

It seems to me that the singing standard of the actress playing the part of the heroine is low. You should give her effective guidance and enable her to perform her songs better. Young as she is, she has a sweet voice, sings with composure and has a strong stage presence. So proper guidance will enable her to give a superior singing performance.

You should see to it that those playing the parts of Song Rim, Chun Sam, Myong Ho and Ki Chang also perform their songs well. The actor playing the part of Chun Sam sings amusingly and the one playing the part of Myong Ho sings reasonably well. If they are given proper guidance they will be able to perform better.

In addition to singing, opera performers should act well. Even though they might sing well, if their acting is poor they will fail to give life to an opera.

This opera illustrates a serious socio-political topic, that of the kind of people who can become members of the Workers' Party of Korea. It shows how an ordinary young nurse becomes a true soldier of the great leader, a member of the Workers' Party of Korea. Therefore, the actress playing the heroine should act with dignity. Currently, however, she seems to be performing the part lightly and in too unsophisticated a manner. If she portrays the heroine in a shallow way, she cannot play her proper role in carrying out the task facing the opera. You should give proper guidance so that she will act with dignity. When actors become used to the stage they may act carelessly. They should guard against this, too.

The actor playing the part of Myong Ho should also be made to act well. When the heroine dies, he should act particularly well, storming about and venting his fury.

In this opera the dances should be combined properly and their standard improved.

In operas the dancing should be subordinated to emphasizing the spiritual world and personalities of the heroes and heroines and to the development of the plot. You should not artificially include in operas dances which bear no relation to the flow of the plot or the personalities of the heroes and heroines.

In this opera, however, the dance portraying the soldiers fighting on

the height fails to highlight the spiritual world and personalities of the heroes and heroine. The opera introduces the existing dance My Heavy Machine Gun intact, so it cannot bring into bold relief the actions of Myong Ho, a heavy-machine gunner, with the result that it is difficult to tell one character from another. If you include this dance in the opera, you should highlight the actions of machine gunner Myong Ho so as to show clearly what sort of man he is. To this end, you should have Myong Ho's hand or arm wounded while battling bravely against the enemy so that he can be distinguished from the other soldiers. His relationship with the heroine should be firmly established so that she comes to realize through his actions what sort of people Party members are.

You should give a vivid presentation of the dance in the scene of a dream about the victory square. Since this scene portrays the heroine's fantasy, the dance should be truly elegant, beautiful and splendid. At present, however, the dance portraying the square of triumph is neither good nor graceful. In a dance in this scene of fantasy the dancers should dance with an elegant and beautiful rhythm around the heroes and heroine as they report their loyalty to the great leader, thus clearly demonstrating the noble spiritual world of these people who revere the leader and firmly believe in victory. You should include a few more dances in the opera. In general, there are not enough dances. You should put more dances in both the first and the second parts of the opera. In the second part you had better make nurses from the dispensary come out and dance to congratulate Myong Ho on leaving the hospital. In this scene the dancing must be included to raise the audience's spirits before the death of the heroine. Then the opera would make a deeper impression.

If you are to produce good dance pieces, you should first compose good dance music.

The great leader has said that the composition of dance music should precede the creation of dance pieces. If music is set to follow dances, no good dance pieces can be produced.

To produce a good opera, you should employ effective stage art. Stage settings and backgrounds should follow real life and fit in with the situation at the time. However, this opera contains some settings and backgrounds that do not suit the situation, especially in the dream sequence. This scene aims to show the square of triumph in a fantastic way, but its setting and background lack cultural refinement and are rough in nature. By making the actors appear with balloons in this scene you fail to depict the heroine's dream world. In her dream you should present the revolutionary capital of Pyongyang, the victory square, in a magnificent, beautiful and glittering way. Skilful stage art will make the Pyongyang of the dream scene more gorgeous and fascinating than it is even today.

You should also improve the setting in the scene of the bombing. Here, the burning ward should collapse even as the heroine is rescuing the patients.

You should ensure that the setting in the scene in which the heroine Kang Yon Ok joins the Party has a wartime atmosphere and that the

setting in the scene of Myong Ho's exercising his legs lacks nothing.

You should make stage costumes fit the times. The costumes of the people in the scene in a village in the south are shabby like those of the people in the revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood*. You have not chosen appropriate costumes. If you use the present costumes, the audience cannot tell whether the action is taking place during the Fatherland Liberation War or in the 1930s. Since the opera is set against the background of the Fatherland Liberation War, the costumes should be appropriate for that time. The costumes in the scene of the dream should not have a rough nature.

You should use the insert titles projected by magic lantern attractively and clearly. They ensure that the audience can clearly understand the revolutionary content of the work, and they disseminate the opera's songs faster and better. I think that the projector that was used today is no good, so I will send you a new one to project the attractively written words.

I believe that if you correct the shortcomings along the lines I have indicated today, this opera will become a good *Sea of Blood*-type revolutionary opera. Even a military opera can make an impression on audiences if the spiritual world of the people is portrayed lyrically. You cannot achieve success simply by showing battles against the enemy, with guns blazing, claiming it is a military opera. This opera does not seem to have caused us as much trouble as the revolutionary opera *The Sea of Blood*; this is because we gained experience while creating that opera. For all that, you should not complete this opera in such a tinkering way, but delve into the details of life to produce a good artistic interpretation. I have been told that you composed 950 songs while creating this opera, so clearly it is by no means an easy task to produce a good opera. In order to perfect it, you should work still harder.

For the rapid completion of the opera, the creators and actors should make energetic efforts. You should finish the improvements in the lyrics and melodies and step up your work with the actors.

The members of the group creating the opera should work hard to produce it and should present to the public, by the earliest possible date, a *Sea of Blood*-type revolutionary opera of high ideological and artistic quality.

Korean Friendship Association (K.F.A)

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