

Ai-en

To Die for Love*

An Opera in Three Acts

Miki Minoru (music)
Setouchi Jakuchou (libretto)

Dramatis Personae

SAKURAKO, born YING'LING. twin sister to RYUREI	lyric soprano
RYUREI, twin sister to SAKURAKO	lyric soprano
ONO KIYOTO, Yamato envoy to Tang	tenor
Prince WAKAKUSA, a Yamato nobleman	baritone
CHOUKEI (ABE NO NAKAMARO)	high baritone
GENSHO, Emperor of Tang	baritone
KOKI, Empress of Tang	soprano
RYUSHO, a merchant from Bokkai	bass
KAGEMI, a priestess	alto
MOUKEN, a master of <i>Go</i> , in love with Ryurei	baritone
KONGO, RIKISHI, artists at the Yamato court	buffo tenor, buffo bass
CHIGUA, NAGISA, KATSURA, attendants to Empress Shomyo	soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto
First JESTER	buffo tenor
Second JESTER	buffo bass
A MAN	bass
A REFEREE	tenor
A HERALD	tenor
AN ARMY COMMANDER	tenor
A MAID	soprano

Chorus of peasant women, townspeople, attendants to imperial celebrations, soldiers, etc.

First Performed: Tokyo: New National Theatre, 17-19th February 2006.

* Translator's Note (TN): The Japanese title of this opera, *Ai-en*, is composed of two Chinese characters, meaning 'love' and 'grudge' or 'malice' respectfully. The English title *To Die for Love* was devised by Colin Graham, a well-known British opera producer and Miki's long time collaborator. In his early career Graham showed a vivid interest in Japanese theatre – which he actually studied locally in Japan for a period – and has since then been responsible for the commissioning and first staging of several of Miki's operas, including *Ada*, *Joururi* and *The Tale of Genji*. In spite of the obvious incongruence with the original Japanese, the English title as it stands meets with the composer's approval.

AI-EN

Act I

Prelude: Music evocative of the serene atmosphere of the eighth-century Nara court.

#1

Lake Sarusawa at dusk, with Mt. Wakakusa and Mt. Mikasa visible in the background.*

Sakurako enters from within, with a bunch of flowers. She is picking their petals off one by one, trying to read her fortune.

Sakurako's aria

Sakurako: Ye flowers, tell me,
To him... or to him...
Which way should my love follow?

If in my heart it is all decided,
Why, then, does my heart hesitate?
How mysterious is love...
How mysterious the affections!

Ye flowers, tell me,
To him... or to him...
Which way should my love follow?

Enter peasant women, in their working outfits, carrying baskets and sickles.
(Meanwhile, Sakurako continues her fortunetelling in the back)

Peasant A: We worked hard once again today.

Peasant B: A short rest to wipe the sweat,
or while squeezing our swollen breasts,
All under grudges and complaints...

Together: We worked, indeed!

Peasant C: At home, our elders and children,
Over their empty bellies...

Together: They cry... and they shout...!

Peasant B: Our baskets burst, full with greens to the brim...

Peasant C: And with plenty of firewood.

Peasant A: So we lost interest in picking the flowers of love

All: That's right; that's so!

* Composer's Note (CN): Temple towers, similar to those built in Yamato from the 7th century onwards, should integrate the stage setting as a symbol of the Nara period.

Beautiful flowers have thorns.
 Do but pick them, and you will sting yourself. (bis)
 They shall profit you nothing.

Peasant A: The sun is setting
All: Let us return, then; let us haste back home!

It darkens suddenly; the peasant women disperse and leave. From under the shade of a tree Kagemi appears, as a shadow. She is leaning on a stick.

Kagemi: What saddens you, my lady?
 Tears do not befit a maiden such as you,
 Who resembles the bud of a peony tree.
 Mourning a lover's absence
 Is bound to bring misfortune.

Frightened, Sakurako makes to run away; an invisible force restrains her.

Kagemi: I am Kagemi, a shrine maiden from this village.
 I can see clearly through
 Each person's heart and destiny.
 Listen! The man you are waiting for...
 Is not yet to return!
 A long time ago, a maiden like you
 Was here wooed by two suitors.
 Among themselves the men disputed her love.
 Unable to make a choice, in deep distress,
 She ended her life at the bottom of this lake.

Sakurako covers her head with her sleeve and faints. Kagemi revives her.

Sakurako: If one is chosen the other will be hurt.
 If both are spurned, both will be hurt.
 They are foster brothers
 And the best friends there can be...
 I cannot have them fight over love for me.
 If only I weren't... (bis)

Kagemi: The flowers of love have a sweet fragrance,
 But do but pick them, and you will sting yourself
 In the painful thorns.

Sakurako: Even so, I want to gather the flowers of love;
 To be inebriated by their sweet fragrance.
 I do not fear the thorns.

Kagemi: The flowers of love have a sweet fragrance,
 But do but pick them, and you will sting yourself.

Kiyoto: Sakurako! Sakurako!
Sakurako: Kiyoto.

Sakurako and Kiyoto run towards each other. Kagemi disappears.

Kiyoto: I am late; bid you do forgive me.
Sakurako: Kiyoto
Kiyoto: My heart was impatient...
 But Prince Wakakusa kept me back...

As the moon rises in the sky, it shines over the two lovers.

Duet

Kiyoto: Tonight for the last time can we watch the moon together.
 Tomorrow evening I must depart for the Tang court.
 Now then, will you reply to my promise?
 As a farewell gift, will you vow your reply to the moon?

Sakurako: My heart belongs to you.
 If both our images cannot be reflected in the moon;
 Then at least let only yours be.

Kiyoto: (Holding Sakurako's hand)
 Ah, such happiness...
 Is it but a dream?
 Why, it is not a dream.

Both: In the pupil of your eyes I do live,
 And in mine own, you do reside.
 The fire burning in our bosoms, in becoming one,
 Proceeds to devour both our hearts.

Kiyoto: For our vows just exchanged,
 Tonight has become the first of our love.
 Until heart and body have been consumed in flames
 Let us not part and only love. Time, halt thy pace!

Sakurako: For our vows just exchanged,
 Tonight has become the first of our love.
 Until heart and body have melted away
 I bid you, do love me. Time, please do halt!

Kiyoto: You belong to me.
Sakurako: Do take me; I belong to you.
Together: Forever... forever this happiness to feel!

They embrace each other. A cloud covers the moon.

Prince Wakakusa, who had come to deliver a present of gold dust to Kiyoto for their farewell, now emerges from the shade of the tree. He has overheard the conversation.

Wakakusa's Aria

Wakakusa: Oh moon... oh moon...
 All have I lost, all which I held dear.
 Royalty, fortune, even my pride,
 Although all I had staked on this love,

Although all I was disposed to throw away
 Oh moon... oh, moon...
 All have I lost;
 Even the pride in friendship and courtship.

Dark change. The middle curtain falls.

#2

In front of the curtain (a path in the court gardens), in the manner of *gigaku*.

Kongo: We are *gigaku* performers at this court. *
 Our fathers and forefathers around a pole did dance,
 In our mothers' wombs around a pole did we dance.
Rikishi: Whatever be, this whole world turns and dances.
 Struggle as you may, bound and tied.
 Squirm as you may, bound and tied.
Together: Guruguru gorogoro
 Guruguru shan! (bis)

The maids to Empress Shomyo enter chatting coquettishly. Chigua, Nagisa and Katsura dance while singing. Kongo and Rikishi merge skilfully with the dance.

Ensemble: Nara, ye flowery town,
 Empress Shomyo, ye queen of flowers;
 And we who serve her, budding, in full blossom
 Or fading, a bunch of flowers are.
 From among all the many fine gentlemen,
 Two alone have all a woman may yearn:
 Prince Wakakusa, and Ono Kiyoto, the courtier.
 Seek and search, and still only these two.
Chigua: Now that Kiyoto has departed,
 This whole city is as if all lights have been extinguished;
 Even up to Prince Wakakusa,
 as if all flowers have faded way.
Nagisa: Prince Wakakusa is heart-broken.
 She chose Kiyoto right before his ship's departure.
 Now the harmony of their loves is lost.
Katsura: How foolish of her!
 If she had but nodded at the Prince, she could become a queen.
Chigua: The mysteries of love are beyond reason;
 There is no telling of loss or gain.

* Translator's Note (TN): A masked danced drama, often performed on the outside of Buddhist temples during memorial services in ancient Japan.

Kiyoto and the Prince are foster brothers.
Katsura: Brave and gallant, of highest nobility is the prince...
Nagisa: Kiyoto, for his appreciation of women, is charming.
Katsura: With the bow and on horseback, the prince has no rival.
Nagisa: On *go* and *kemari*, Kiyoto is supreme.
Katsura: On the *biwa*, Kiyoto...
Nagisa: ...and on the flute, the prince.
Chigua: Sakurako kept hesitating... It is only natural, her loss.
Together: And the ship? Is it safe, I wonder?
Rikishi, Kongo: Come now, you know it full well, do you not,
 Kiyoto left her a delightful farewell gift,
 Which she now carries in her womb.

Suddenly, the sound of thunder roars as the scene becomes dark. They vanish in the darkness.

#3

The envoy ship to Tang. The music evokes a storm. Sound of waves; screams; sutra recitation to Kannon*.

(Chorus): We drift the wide sea; by dragons, fish, and a myriad of monsters tormented.
 Under thy shelter, gracious Kannon, no wave can give us grave.
 Clouds or thunder; hail or downpour,
 Under thy shelter, gracious Kannon, all shall vanish in a moment.

This scene may be entrusted solely to the music, or may be staged. Finally, the music suggests the occurrence of a shipwreck. It is also possible to build a stage ship and show it sinking at sea following to the musical dynamics.

#4

Three months after Kiyoto's departure, summer has already ended, and an autumn breeze now blows. At Kiyoto's house; in the garden, in a stool placed on the ground under a large *enju* tree, Sakurako weaves a garment for her yet-to-be-born child.†

Sakurako: My dear sweet baby...
 Dear Kiyoto's sweet baby...
 Mummy is weaving you a swaddle.
 Your own little swaddle.
 Daddy is far, far away,

* TN: Buddhist goddess of clemency.

† TN: A large leguminous plant, originally from China, which can reach a height of up to 10 to 15 meters and which produces white and yellow butterfly-shaped flowers during summer. Its woody stalk is used in architecture and in the making of various tools and utensils. It stands here in this early scene, as it seems, as a symbol of the cultural connection between Japan and the Asian mainland, particularly that between Nara Japan and Tang China, on which this opera centers.

But he shall soon return
With many, many presents.

Prince Wakakusa rushes in from stage right, his face changed in colour. He stops short, listening to Sakurako's peaceful singing voice.

Wakakusa: Such happy semblance...
Without her knowing, let us pursue all means
To destroy that happiness;
That sight so horrible to me.

He is found by Sakurako while wandering hesitatingly at the entrance.

Sakurako: Ah, my lord!
When did you arrive here?
Please, come in, I beg you.
Good gracious, you look pale sire.

Wakakusa: Blame it on the *enju*'s leaves.

Sakurako: Why were you hiding over there,
Like a child playing hide-and-peek?

Wakakusa: Hide-and seek... Fond memories
Of our childhood you raise... When everyday
We would play hide-and-peek. Just the three of us.

Sakurako: That would be you, sire, Kiyoto and Sakurako.

Wakakusa: Childhood is like a precious jewel...

Sakurako: A bright jewel, limpid all through.

Wakakusa: Time should have halted then.
It would have been far better
Never to know today's unhappiness.

Sakurako: 'Today's unhappiness', sire, what do you mean?

Wakakusa: Sakurako, I bring you difficult news.
I beg you, do be brave at heart.
The ship Kiyoto sailed on to Tang, was lost at sea.

Sakurako faints. Catching her before she falls, the prince takes the chance to embrace her. He then lies her down on the ground, where she remains immobile, as if dead. Suddenly, in a suffocating voice, she bursts into bitter wailing. The prince goes to embrace her once again as if trying to bring her comfort. As he tries to do so she repulses him violently, jumps up from the ground, and runs around the *enju* tree at a furious pace. She disfigures herself, deranges her hair furiously – no longer in her senses.

Sakurako: Kiyoto, Kiyoto, where are you?
(suddenly changing to an infantile voice)
Don't play hide-and-peek with me now.
Come out, Kiyoto.

While weeping Prince Wakakusa makes to embrace Sakurako. Employing all her strength she manages to repulse him and rushes out of the house pursued by Wakakusa.

The above took place at stage right. From here the dimmed lights change focus so that only stage left becomes visible. Scenery dominated by Lake Saruzawa becomes visible somewhat in perspective, within blue lighting. Sakurako runs towards the lake. The prince pursues her, but made faster because of her derangement, she outruns him. Kagemi now appears. She makes to hold Sakurako, but the latter escapes and throws herself into the lake. (Shadow chorus) Only Sakurako's red sash remains in Kagemi's hand. This whole section is performed as pantomime. The lighting should indicate the fantastic quality of the events, and the music emphasise the pathetic mood. Lighting is used to emphasise the solemnity of the lake's calm surface. Suddenly, the stage becomes dark.

Interlude (Two years go by during this piece)

#5

A southern town, far from the capital, Chang'an* ; the curtain rises over a large, busy town square, on the middle of which stands a tall stone monument. (In order to facilitate arranging the movements of the crowd) sales stands are lined-up. The place is bustling with people. Fortune-tellers and street performers can be seen around. Gambling is going on by the roadside. There is a platform at stage left, somewhat toward the inner stage. On top of it sits a *go* board, where two men are playing a match. Around the platform, red flags read 'Great *Go* Competition'. People are also crowding around there. Pushed by someone, a man tumbles out of the crowd and bumps into another man. It is Kiyoto, in shabby clothes, looking like a tramp.

A Man: What a... Sneaking into my pocket, right?
Kiyoto: (in a resolute manner) I am no pickpocket.
Man: A beggar, then, you rascal?
Kiyoto: I am not a beggar.
Man: You just bumped into me.
Kiyoto: I felt dizzy, that was all. I have had nothing to eat lately.

The sound of cheers arises from the *go* platform. The match is over. The winner's name has been called out and he is being feted by the crowd.

Kiyoto: What's with the row over there?
Man: That's the final of the *go* Tournament. There is a prize.
Kiyoto: What is it?
Man: Three chicken.

Kiyoto makes to reel towards the competition platform. The man buys some grilled rice cakes from a nearby stand, goes after him and hands them over for him to eat.

* TN: Pronounced Chouan in Japanese, this city was the capital of China for several dynasties, including the Tang. Its estimated one million strong population during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (Gensho in this opera) made it the most populous city in the world at the time. The city was renamed to its current name of Xi'an during the Ming period.

Man: Here. You cannot play on an empty stomach.

Enraptured, Kiyoto gulps down two rice cakes; then silently proceeds to sit in front of the *go* board. His opponent is already seated. He calmly measures Kiyoto with his eyes. Kiyoto bows with proper courtesy and lifts his stones. The number of onlookers progressively increases. During the match, as more and more onlookers of noble appearance fill the area, stage right and the platform disappear from sight. Choukei (Abe no Nakamaro), who is on his return voyage to Chang'an after having inspected the Southern region, appears with his retinue.*

Spectator A: Now here is a great match.

Spectators: Indeed it is.

Spect. A: He is the town's *go* master

Spect. B: The god of *go*!

Spectators: He is so strong...

Man: Hang on, you poor hack. Don't lose.

Spectators: Hang on, you poor hack. What a great match!

Choukei has left his place and come progressively closer, up to a place from which he can observe the match. Kiyoto plays down the last stone.

Referee: We have a winner.

Kiyoto: My name is Kiyoto.

Referee: Kiyoto has won.

Spectators: He did it! What a magnificent victory!

He beat the town's *go* master.

Where did he learn to play like this?

Choukei: He seemed possessed by a spirit...

There is something oddly familiar in his attitude, his bearing...

Maybe he is my countryman.

Spectators: Where did he come from? His looks...

Kiyoto: I came from beyond the sea,

From the distant country Yamato.

My ship sank, and I was washed ashore in the southern sea.

I am heading for the capital

Playing *go* along the way to feed myself.

Spectators: He is heading for the capital. From beyond the sea,

From the country of Yamato he came.

Choukei: I am a public official;

I have finished my inspections, under imperial orders,

* TN: Abe no Nakamaro (698-770) was a historical figure about whom not much is known. In 717 he arrived in Tang China as a student from Nara Japan and was never to return. During his career Nakamaro came to rise to a high position as a civil servant of the Tang. He was also a man of letters, appreciated today, and probably during his time as well, as a gifted *waka* poet. Probably by oversight, the character prompts for this character on the original libretto read 'Nakamaro' in Act I but 'Choukei' in Acts II and III, making it look as if these were two different characters. I have corrected this by changing all Act I prompts to 'Choukei'.

And now return to the capital Chang'an.
There must be meaning to our encounter.
Pray do tell me your story.

Choukei leads Kiyoto to one side of the stage.

Referee: (rushes in carrying three chicken)

Hey, wait! Here is your prize. Chickens. Three chickens.

Spectators: Ha, ha, ha!

With three chickens as his prize
Starving Kiyoto shall have his belly full.
For three whole days his belly shall be full.
Enjoy it!

He came from Yamato;
From across the sea he came.
Kiyoto made himself a big profit in Tang;
Tough lucky fellow; not even the storm could kill him.
Go, hurry yourself up the fast road to fortune.

Women have a weakness for gold and strength.
They shall cling to Kiyoto's lucky rod.
Take women instead, and you shall find them
Rich in juices and their meat firmer than chicken.
There is poison in the finest of meats.

With only one rod
Kiyoto can lure three women at once.
Then, from morning to evening, to late at night,
He shall be out of line.
Kiyoto's fishing rod, helpless little thing!
Ha ha ha! Ha, ha, ha!

#6

Choukei and Kiyoto on a different corner of the square, slightly later on the same day. Out of heartfelt kindness towards Kiyoto, Choukei has arranged for several delicately prepared fish dishes to be brought in succession. Starving, Kiyoto devours his food.

Choukei: (laughing)

You are hungry like a starved beast!

Kiyoto: I have not eaten for three days.

Almost did not have the strength to venture the match.

Choukei: His words... such Yamato words as I haven't heard for a long time.
The good old language of my homeland.

Without thinking, Choukei stands up, and while pacing the room continues his monologue. Kiyoto picks up a flute that is lying about and begins to play.

Choukei's aria

Choukei: Fond memories, cherished remembrance
Of my homeland left behind.
The mountains, the rivers, the gentle breeze...
and all the cherished faces, eternally planted in our heart.
I was only sixteen then, a mere boy...
Now I have passed the barrier of fifty:
Inexorable is aging!
All in this world is but flowing away...
All is flying away.
For long have the tears of homesickness accumulated.

(to Kiyoto)

I am Abe no Nakamaro. In this country I am called Choukei.

Kiyoto: Abe no Nakamaro
Crowd: Abe no Nakamaro
Kiyoto: A legendary man...
Crowd: Now here, standing before us.
Kiyoto: A unique man among the Japanese. He passed...
Crowd: He passed...
Kiyoto: ...the civil office examinations...
Crowd: ...the civil office examinations...
Kiyoto: ...became a minister of the Tang...
Crowd: ...he became a minister in our country...
Kiyoto: ...and accumulated the Emperor's favour.
Crowd: Envious lot!
Kiyoto: A fortunate man like no other.
Crowd: Fortunate indeed.
Choukei: Being loved by the Emperor of a foreign country
Has made my return more difficult.
My spirit is that of an eternal wanderer,
But a stranger always grieves for the forfeited homeland.
Crowd: Ah, an eternal wanderer.
The grief of one who left it all behind
Is his homeland... his homeland.
Choukei: Fond memories, cherished remembrance
Of my homeland left behind.
The mountains, the rivers, the gentle breeze...
And all the cherished faces, eternally planted in our heart.
Crowd: That is such a pity.

The crowd returns to its original place. As the day reaches its end, the crowd starts to leave the public square. Gradually, lighting remains only on Kiyoto and Choukei. In an attempt to console Choukei, Kiyoto begins to play the flute.

Choukei: Moon far in the horizon,
Are you not that who shines in spring over Mikasa?* (bis)

Kiyoto, overcome by nostalgia cries bitterly, bent over a table.

Kiyoto: Sakurako, Sakurako...
When shall we meet again?

Choukei: Do you have a wife?
Or a lover, maybe...

Kiyoto's Aria

Kiyoto: Just before my departure, my dear wife was united to me.
Our honeymoon lasted no longer than a mere day.
If we had both died that day
We would never have felt the pain of separation, perhaps...

Choukei: Perhaps...

Kiyoto: Sakurako, my Sakurako...
Drifting the ocean
Without bearing or compass...
Your image was my only salvation.
Sharp as an arrow
A voice kept insisting within me:
"Stay alive... stay alive...
For my sake, and that of your little child"
If only I could realize whether or not it was human,
The voice that rescued me from the gates of Death;
There, on the sand of that southern beach
I found myself alive.

Choukei: What rescued you from the gates of Death
Was the strength of Sakurako's love and prayer.
Now, return to your country without delay.
So that you won't follow in my sad tracks.

Kiyoto: I am a courtier.
I cannot return without accomplishing
The strict orders imposed on me by Empress Shomyo.

* NT: This poem was composed by the historical Abe no Nakamaro and appears in the poetry collection known as *Kokinwakashu*, or 'Anthology of Early and Modern Japanese Poetry'. This collection of poetry mostly in the form known as *tanka* (often also referred to as *waka*) was compiled during the 10th century; it contains 1,111 poems (in most editions) arranged in 20 individually titled scrolls, of which this poem, one of the most celebrated of the entire collection, appears as number 406 in the ninth scroll. The repetition of the last line is not part of the poetic form, but rather here introduced by the music.

Choukei: What are, pray you, those strict orders?
Kiyoto: Out of her great passion for the *biwa*,
Empress Shomyo has requested me to bring her
From Empress Koki, the piece *Ai-en*.
Choukei: *Ai-en*? Yes, that title is well known,
But no one has ever heard that piece.
It is still being kept secret.
Only the Empress and her maid Ryurei can play it.
That shall be a problem for you.
Kiyoto: My dear Sakurako,
Part of my very self and my image,
Nara is now so far... too far...
Since wandering, starving and living on the streets,
Thoughts of home have filled my mind.
The pain of endless wandering,
The bitterness of never-ending solitude,
For this sole love I endured.
With that voice
Always in my mind,
All can I endure.
I shall never forget...
I can never forget
My dear wife,
Sakurako... Sakurako...

End of Act 1