



*War Sum Up 2011 (Gunars Janaitis)*

# War Sum Up

By Annette Vandsø

*War Sum Up* (2011) is not a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' in which the separate parts melt seamlessly together and point towards a single joint narrative. Instead the visuals, the choreography, the lyrics and text, the costumes, and the music each live their separate lives. Each dimension encompasses an abundance of sensuous expressions and meanings that are not mirrored in the other parts. For instance, projected onto the backdrop stage curtain we see *Hikary Hayashi's* manga images, while the libretto for its part bears no trace of a similar aesthetics. On the whole, the visual design, which is the epitome of lighting designer Jesper Kongshaug's and Kirsten Dehlholm's longstanding collaboration, is a predominant aspect, due to the various images projected onto the stage curtains. Apart from the manga images these projections consist of texts, abstract patterns, and movements, as well as something that resembles genuine war reportage photographs, where, among other things, we see images of mutilated bodies.

Musically the opera also comprises different genres and genre conventions. We are presented to both electronic music and newly composed vocal music performed by conventional bel canto voices. However, the different styles do not appear to be opposites. Instead the microtonal structures and the repetitive, simple phrases of the vocal music blend effortlessly into the electronic sound universe.

Rather than following Wagner's ideal of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' *War Sum Up* refers to an avant-gardist tradition for non-psychological scenic expression with a high degree of independence between the individual means of expression. Quintessential examples are Jean Cocteau's cubistic ballet *Parade* (1917), in which a radically modernist visual expression in the form of Pablo Picasso's costumes and set design was combined with more lowbrow entertainment forms such as vaudeville theatre (see, Rothschild 1991: 31- 32), as well as John Cage's *Untitled Event* (1951). The latter was a collaboration between Cage, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, and painter Robert Rauschenberg, and presented an almost nude 1:1 assemblage of movements, sound, and images that are not mutually synchronized or related. However, in contrast to *Untitled Event*, *War Sum Up* does have narrative elements, as well as an overall theme, namely war. Furthermore, in *War Sum Up* we are not confronted with the naked scenic space as it is. Instead the stage is transformed into a hyper-mediated space with a spectacular and thoroughly composed aesthetics. And even though the individual expressive dimensions do not merge in a conventional manner, they still interweave in a saturated texture that creates a new kind of relationship – maybe even a new kind of 'Gesamtkunstwerk' – in which the focus is not on the narrative impetus, but on the textures of images, sounds, scenography, and costumes.