Ichikawa Ennosuke II (1888-1963)

Ichikawa Ennosuke II was a kabuki actor in the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa eras who collaborated with artists in the modern drama movement and was instrumental in the Shin Buyō (New Dance) movement. He is seen as a progressive, even radical artist who reinvigorated kabuki through innovation, and modern and western influences.

Born Kinoshi Masayasu, the son of Ichikawa Danshirō II, he began performing child roles in Kabuki at an early age, debuting at the Kabuki-za in Tokyo in 1892 under the name Ichikawa Danko I. He spent the next two decades performing traditional kabuki. He also joined Ichikawa Sadanji II and Osanai Kaoru’s Jiyū Gekijō (Free Theatre), in 1909, participating in the early development of shingeki. In 1910 he took the name Ichikawa Ennosuke II and performed in plays by modern and shin-kabuki playwright Okamoto Kidō.

In 1919 Ichikawa travelled to the United States and Europe to experience western theatre and dance. The productions he encountered profoundly shaped his understanding of performance and fired his imagination. Upon his return to Japan he began experimenting with fusions of modern and traditional forms. In September 1919 he premiered an adaptation of the play *Sumidagawa* (The Sumida River) influenced by Russian ballet. In 1920 he joined other modernist artists to form Shunjūza, a ‘study group’ and artists’ collective including Osanai Kaoru, Ichikawa Sadanji II, Bandō Jusaburō III, Ichikawa Sumizō VI, and Ichikawa Shōchō II, the last three all kabuki actors, to present plays by Tanizaki Jun’ichiro, Kikuchi Kan, and Okamoto Kidō

In 1920 he also founded the Haruaki-za Theatre Company, producing innovative new dance dramas such as *Mushi* and *Koma.* He became instrumental in the Shin Buyō (New Dance) movement. He remained active in the shingeki movement as well, performing in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* with Gesai Kai.

In the wake of the Second World War he became the senior actor in the kabuki world and president of Haiyū Kyōkai (The Actors Association). In 1955 he became the first artistic envoy from Japan to the People’s Republic of China, touring Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou with kabuki classics *Kanjinchō* (The Subscription Scroll) and *Keisei Hangonkō*. During the tour he was able to meet Beijing opera star Mei Lan-Fang. In May, 1963 he took the name Ichikawa En’o I, allowing his grandson Danko to become Enosuke III. The following month, on June 12, he passed away.

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