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| Kawakami Otojirō (1864-1911) |
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| Kawakami Otojirō (1864-1911) was an actor, comedian, and impresario in Japan’s early modern period who was the first to tour Japanese performances, albeit in a rather unconventional exoticized forms, to the West in 1899-1901 and again from 1901-2. Otojirō married the actress, and former geisha, Kawakami Sada Yakko in 1896. She became his major creative collaborator, and she was the troupe’s featured performer during their tours.  The troupe went to France from 1907 to 1908 to study every aspect of Western theatre. Upon their return to Japan, Kawakami opened the Imperial Actress Training Institute, and the Imperial Theatre as a home for the troupe in Osaka.  Otojirō left his home in Fukuoka at age14, ending up in Kyoto where he had several occupations and became a liberal political agitator until he apprenticed to a *rakugo* (comic storytelling) master. His apprenticeship inspired him to create an amateur theatre company with a fellow political activist. The amateur status of the troupe allowed them to fly slightly under the radar of the authorities, but in 1888, Kawakami created a musical sensation, the Oppekepe [trumpet] Song. This was a satirical song with a rousing chorus that imitated the sound of a trumpet, ‘oppekepe!’ |
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