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| Bungei Kyōkai |
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| Launched in February 1906 out of a drama club of Waseda University students, Bungei Kyōkai was one of the two pioneering organizations of modernist movement in Japanese theatre, the other being Jiyū Gekijō. Bungei Kyōkai, particularly its second period, is considered the beginning of shingeki for its contributions to modernism in establishing professional actors and actresses in modern Japanese theatre, its impact on society, and in its having elite intellectuals as its leaders.    During its early period, Bungei Kyōkai was more reformative in nature: while it produced selected acts of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*, it also produced Tsubouchi Shōyō’s modern kabuki *A Paulownia Leaf* (Kiri hitoha), and the role of Portia in *Merchant* was played by an onnagata (male performer of female roles in kabuki). This led to the resignation of disappointed members and its financial difficulties. To overcome the challenges, Shimamura Hōgetsu, Tsubouchi Shōyō’s disciple and the de facto manager of the organization, persuaded his teacher to take direct charge from February 1909. Shōyō started Bungei Kyōkai’s second period by building, on the property of his own residence, a theatre academy, intended for both training and research. The two-year co-ed Academy program was quite rigorous, with Hōgetsu and Shōyō among the instructors and using as textbooks the original script of *The Merchant of Venice* and the English translation of *A Doll’s House*. Later, however, elements of traditional Japanese performing arts, including kyōgen and stage fighting, were added to the curriculum, reflecting Shōyō’s vision of a national theatre as the ultimate goal of Bungei Kyōkai. |
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