

**FROM CORYPHEI TO PROFESSIONALISM: THE
EVOLUTION OF UKRAINIAN THEATER**

This article presents a brief history of the Coryphaei Theater, which was associated with the leading actors in the chorus of ancient Greek theater. The article also discusses the birth of the first professional Ukrainian theater, which was a result of many years of struggle against the suppression of Ukrainian language and culture.

The Coryphaei were the leading actors in the chorus of ancient Greek theater. They played a crucial role in maintaining contact between the actors and the chorus, summarizing the monologue they heard, or announcing the appearance of a new character. The term «coryphaeus» eventually acquired a figurative meaning of a leading person in any field.

The name of the Coryphaei Theater was associated with the book «Coryphaei of the Ukrainian Stage», which was anonymously published by representatives of the Kyiv intelligentsia in 1901. In it, famous actors such as Marko Kropyvnytskyi, Mykhailo Starytskyi, Ivan Tobilevych, and others were first called «coryphaei of the Ukrainian theater».

The birth of the first professional Ukrainian theater was a result of the struggle against the suppression of Ukrainian language and culture. In 1876, the Russian Emperor Alexander II signed the Ems Decree, which banned Ukrainian literature completely, including theatrical performances. However, in 1881, the clause of the Ems Decree banning Ukrainian plays was revised, allowing performances in Ukrainian or Polish only after the actors had performed the same program in Russian. This step «legalized» the existence of Ukrainian theater, and Mark Kropyvnytskyi staged Shevchenko's play *Nazar Stodolya* on January 10, 1882.

The first attempt was unsuccessful due to the professional level of the actors, but the second attempt in 1882 marked the beginning of the heyday of professional theater in Ukraine. Marko Lukych gathered a troupe called the Society of Actors, which included famous actors such as the Tobilevych brothers, Mykhailo Starytskyi, Yefrosynia Zarnytska, Maria Zankovetska, and others. The artists all had professional training and natural voice talents, and the theater worked closely with famous composers of the time, such as Petro Nishchynsky and Kyrylo Stetsenko.

The Coryphaei Theater and the birth of the first professional Ukrainian theater are significant historical events that demonstrate the resilience and determination of the Ukrainian people to preserve their language and culture despite suppression. The contribution of the Coryphaei Theater to the development of Ukrainian theater and stage music is noteworthy and deserves recognition.

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