

## **Seoul in Broadway: A Korean Artist in New York**

Korean creative artists and actors performed at Joe's Pub, a historical club and theater located in downtown New York City on February 2nd. Joe's Pub is part of the New York public theater, and it is a renowned place where talented artists perform a wide variety of genres. The performance was entitled "Seoul of Broadway," and since the word 'Seoul' and 'soul' are homonyms, they created this title as a meaning of 'the soul of people who came into the Broadway scene from Korea.' It is now common to see Korean Americans on television, movies, and on stage. However, it is very rare to see Korean citizens born in Korea perform on stage in New York City. Therefore, "Seoul of Broadway" was a meaningful performance organized by Korean artists and actors who are unified in trying to achieve success on stage in New York City and were supported by an understanding audience.

Sohyang Kim, Hyungjin Cha, Kyujin Lim, and other Korean actors working in the US performed songs of musicals that are in progress of being completed by Korean composers. The performance, which was organized in a showcase form, was a combination of musical pieces created by composers who studied a Master's in musical theater composing at New York University. Something that lacked commonly in the performances was utilizing their stories of finding their identity as Korean artists living in New York. This might have been due to the fact that only a few out of the 10 lyrics of the songs were written by Korean lyricists. Due to the fact that the program had American lyricists, it gave an impression that the performances were a showcase of musicals that American writers and lyricists were creating. Because the performance was centered in the theme of Korean artists working in New York, it would have been more intriguing to see the trials of a them finding their own identity as foreigners in a foreign land.

After the performance, we were able to interview composer Chiyong Kim, who planned and produced "Seoul of Broadway," and Hyungjin Cha and Kyujin Lim, actors who participated in the performance. It was interesting to have Korean media interview Korean artists after a Korean performance at an American public theater.

## Interview

-First of all, congratulations on your concert. How do you feel?

Kim, Chee-Young : I could finally go to sleep now. (laugh) I was worried that we would have a small audience but at the same time I was relieved that I could rent Joe's Pub for the concert because it is not an easy place to rent. The director Shakina helped me out a lot. I was a great experience.

Cha, Hyungjin(Hugh): Singing songs written by composers who share my Korean culture made me feel warm/proud as a performer. It was a good show.

Lim, GyuJin: This is the first concert led by Korean composers and singers. Korean artists are growing more and more each year in Musical Theatre. Also the Korean community in NYC Tisch Theatre Writing Program is getting bigger.

-Tell us how you started working in Theatre in New York City

Kim, Chee-Young, I majored in composition back in Korea, then completed the Creative Academy from Musical Creation Company 'Fire and Ice.' After that, I moved to New York to study 'Musical Theatre Writing' at NYU's Graduate school. Since my graduation last year, I have been working here in NYC.

Cha, Hyungjin(Hugh), I came to America to study when I was middle school. I thought about studying business, but instead chose to study acting as well as learning B-boy and modern dance. I came to New York after completing my Bachelor's Degree and the Master's degree in Musical Theatre.

Lim, GyuJin: I started dreaming about becoming a musical theatre actress when I saw '42nd street' as a young kid. I moved to New York to study theatre.

-What was the purpose of this concert?

Kim, Chee-Young, Now, there are about 30 alumni studied at NYU Musical Theatre Writing. Composers working in Korea like 고성일, 최종윤, 이지혜, 이나오 are all NYU graduates. There are not many opportunities for people like me who just graduated from school. There are various projects for Americans, but not for foreign students. Same thing applies to Korean actors such as Q and Hugh. So I started this project to make our own show with people who share the same dreams.

-How was studying Musicals in New York?

Kim, Chee-Young: The biggest advantage I got from studying in NY was that I got to work with all kinds of people from all over the world. When about thirty students present their work, there is not even one song that is in a similar style as the others. I felt like each of our styles were respected which gave me confidence that I could trust my work and go forward.

-What is the most difficult thing from working in NY?'

Cha, Hyungjin: Keeping your status is very difficult. I have been preparing to get a visa or a green card myself. Gyu Jin Lim was cast as a very important role in a Broadway show *The King and I* but she could not do the show because of her visa status.

Lim, Gyujin: I was not the only one who couldn't do the show because of the same reason

Cha, Hyungjin: The musical community is more conservative compared to movies and tv when it comes to casting. It is true that we as asian actors have limited roles we can play due to the some what more conservative audience. GyuJin Lim and myself are a few actors from Korea who are actively working in this business. I believe that this will change if we keep challenging ourselves. And of course, this will help open the door for the next generation when they come to NY to do Musical Theatre.

-What would you like to say to people who want to work or study Musical Theatre in America?

Cha, Hyungjin: Having passion and belief that you can do this is very important. People who do their work confidently with passion and dreams are more attractive than people who are already good.

Lim, Gyujin: There is a reason why we took the challenge to stay and work here in NYC even though it's very tough. I love challenges. There are many other actors who are talented and have no language problems, but there are people who trust in me because I work hard.