

King and I, Boston Korea Article Translation

'Korean International Student, plays a major role in a musical *King and I*

"There are too limited opportunities for Asians in Musical Theater"

"I would like to be a mentor for next generation Korean musical theater performers in America"

'(Boston = Boston Korea) Hyun-Chun Kim, Journalist = Dreaming of being on Broadway, Hyung Jin Cha (American name Hugh Cha, 28-year-old) lived an aspiring and hardworking life. Cha's success to play the lead role in Lyric theatre of Oklahoma stage in *King and I* has become a major issue in America.

Directed by Alan Muraoka, Cha is playing the lead role of Luntha, an ambassador who falls in love with princess Tuptim which leads him to his death. The other lead role superstars include Mel Maghuyop and Youn-Jeong Sung. The musical will be performed from July 9th to July 13th.

Cha, currently studying MFA, Musical Theater at Boston Conservatory is the head scholarship recipient of the program. Cha has been actively performing in Boston including *Sound of Music* at the Museum of Fine Arts and Archives & Etchings sponsored by Alzheimer's Association.

Cha has always been interested in arts. When he first came to the United States to attend middle school, he soothed his loneliness by playing the piano. During his high school years, he started breakdancing.

After graduating from high school, he was casted as a lead in a film, 'A Story of the Woods'(directed by Ji-Hong Min) and earned multiple awards at various independent film festivals. However, he decided to attend Brigham Young University to study business at his father will.

But after seeing a few Broadway musicals in New York, he switched his major to Music Dance Theater during his junior year. Cha said, "I loved the energy and liveliness I felt on stage"

Cha moved to New York after completing his undergraduate studies 2 years ago to fulfill his dreams. However, he tasted the experience of lifetime failure.

Cha went to audition whenever and wherever he could, but no one was going to hire a small Asian actor with no experience in the big stage. He auditioned at least 180 times for one year without any success. There was no explanation why he did not get the role. Cha's talent seemed to have no improvement.

Cha invested all his time auditioning and had to start working at a restaurant on the side to earn a living. Sometimes he had to work 15 hours a day to barely meet his living expenses. He explained that the most difficult part was not the physical exhaustion but the fact that he had to earn a living by doing something that didn't relate to his major and had to deal with mistreatment by the customer and manager of the restaurant.

After continuous rejections, one lucky opportunity came and he was finally casted in a show. However, it was an off-off Broadway stage which paid him \$300 for 6 months of work and the characters he played were mainly racially discriminated roles.

"Not only Broadway but small theater performance opportunities are rarely available for Asian performers. There are no stories about Asians in general. Even when I was given an opportunity to audition for an American story role, my Korean accent became an issue and I eventually was not given the role."

Cha suffered financially and did not have enough time and money to work on his accent reduction. He also realized there was no other Korean male actor who could mentor him through this difficulty in the United States.

Cha also realized if he was only seen as an international Korean male performer with an accent, his role might be limited to discriminated Asian roles. Cha desired to overcome and become an exceptional performer. Without a doubt, Cha applied for best musical theater school in America that offered a Masters Program and he was accepted into the Boston Conservatory as a top scholarship recipient.

Cha invests his time from 9 am to 1 am almost every day crafting his talents such as accent reduction, acting and singing. Cha said, "I'm happy that I'm able to invest my time on practicing". He did not have enough time to practice during his first year in New York because

of merely trying to survive as an actor.

He is one of the first Korean male musical performers to be casted as a lead role in a major American musical production. He will soon be heading to New York for rehearsal and then leave to Oklahoma to perform.

After the production, Cha plans to come back to Boston to finish his studies. Cha also said, "I want to proudly be on stage as a Korean male musical performer in America. There weren't any Asian mentors who could guide me. However, I would like to become a mentor for future emerging Korean musical artists."

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