

Some Reflections on the Summer Visits by the Three Travelling Young Company Members.



My Korea Experience

On Friday 13th June, supposedly an 'unlucky' day, my drama teacher approached me and led me into her office. I was scared, as I take drama seriously. She opened her mouth for the first time and said 'You're going to Korea'. I froze. I was ecstatic. The two rounds of applications and interviews had paid off. Just a week earlier I was looking around the classroom at the other 10 applicants, fantasising about what I believed was an impossible scenario of me being in Korea, but no, it was happening and I was pleased about it. I had to hug her, she was a saint to me at that moment and I just didn't know what to say but thank you.

48 days later, my alarm went off at 6am. I had no trouble waking up when I realised that it was the day that I would be flying to Korea. Everything was an excited blur until the moment just before take-off at which I turned to my right to say to one of the two girls going with me, 'WE'RE GOING TO KOREA!' she looked at me, puzzled, agreeing with me, but I just couldn't contain the excitement. 12-ish hours and



hardly any sleep later, we stepped out of the plane and walked through a tube walkway to the airport. Standing in line at customs, I gazed up to check if I was in the right queue and I was astonished to see a sign, printed with square shapes, random circles and odd lines. Looking back on it, I must have been really jetlagged to be that confused, but it was strange. Then I realised, I'm in Korea, that sign must be Korean. Soon enough I noticed an English translation just below it. That was a

moment of both culture shock and fascination with being in such a mysterious place.

I found myself having similar moments throughout my stay, like being in a convenience store in the morning looking for a packet of crisps and realising that you can't just pick up a prawn cocktail bag of walkers because it's all in Korean. Buying a bag of crisps had never been so complicated. Especially with the annoyance of there being no pictures on the front of a packet, it was outrageous. Then again, I couldn't be angry with Korean crisp packet designers, after all, Korean products would inevitably have Korean text on it. Although it sounds like I'm moaning about this crisp situation, I was grateful for experiences like this because it pushed me to be more adventurous, and somehow, food tastes better when you don't know what it is.

Traditional Korean restaurants were amazing, they were places of beauty. The low tables sat at a perfect height and were so comfortable; it felt like I was at home, not at a restaurant because of the fact that there were cushions to sit on the floor instead of chairs. They had paper sliding doors with thin lines of dark wood in lines to create rectangle and square gaps for light to leak in, through the delicately translucent paper, and that was just a door. Everything about the décor and the layout of the table, even the food was picturesque. Practically all of the food came in small bowls which was very easy to hold and pass around, and to lift food out of. Many of these bowls were



continuously placed down by waitresses then other empty bowls were taken away, and most of the food could be categorised into rice, meat, noodle, kimchi, dip, or soup. That was pretty much how I noticed food, and you never quite knew what a certain food exactly was, and you could tell what most of them were. But then, there were foods in disguise. I'll explain this with a story which shows my bad judgment when it comes to identifying what was in front of me. Now, I'm a person who tries a food, then



decides that I don't like it, and I will then avoid that food, not trying it again, basing the taste of the food on my first experience and fish is one of them foods. I don't particularly like the smell or texture of fish, and it's usually pretty distinctive amongst other foods, usually. I was sitting in a traditional, very beautiful restaurant and I was quite hungry, so I began eating some of the smaller foods that they give you at the start of the meal, for example, kimchi which is spicy

pickled vegetables or small bits of meat. So, I picked out a piece of what I thought was maybe pork or beef, and ate it, and it was really nice, I really liked what it was, and I tried to pick out what I liked about the flavour but I just couldn't figure out why it was so delicious, so I asked one of the Korean adults what that food was, and explained how delicious it was, then they said, without hesitation, 'oh, its fish, mashed up with some flavoured paste and seasoning, then cut into slices' then they returned to their other table business, eating and talking amongst other adults. My face dropped, my eyes widened. I looked down at the strips and it dawned upon me that I had just eaten a whole bowl of fish; I hesitantly got another piece and put it in my mouth. It didn't taste as good after knowing what it was, but I learnt that I should just try food, even if I've had it before and didn't like it, because I could end up eating it and enjoying it.

Our reason for going to Korea was to assemble and work on developing a play through collaboration with Korean and British teens, which was pretty exciting. When we first stepped into The National Theatre Company of Korea's big theatre, I saw a group of about 12 kids our age, playing a game with a ball that looked like volleyball, and they just looked like a group of teenagers, the way they dressed, their



hair, they just looked like normal teenagers, not how I was expecting them to be, strange and extremely different from us. Most of them turned and looked immediately at us as we came in, and a great sea of 'hello's came over our way, we felt very welcomed, in true Korean style. A few of them came up some

stairs nearer to the back of the seating area in the theatre where we were putting down our bags and they invited us down to play, I immediately gazed back my two British friends, then went down with them, I had to let out my excitement. One of the British adults went down too, and it was great, it wasn't the most complicated or strategic game in the world, but it was so fun. The atmosphere was buzzing, I felt like I was just playing with my friends from home, not with strangers who I had just met. The first 4 hour session was amazing, I could feel the connection with the other teens when I looked at them as I spoke, even though I couldn't understand when they were replying, I sub consciously nodded my head in agreement, because although I didn't understand what they were saying, I felt that I could understand them as people. It's difficult to explain the connection we had with them because it felt like it was a connection of our hearts more than our tongues, we didn't need to speak the same language, or be from the same country or background to be on the same level as them because the fact that we were



all around the same age and in a similar situation seemed to unite us in a way that I had honestly never experienced before.

The workshop sessions continued through the week, with the Korean talent really showing in the room, the creativity of the ideas they were producing astonished me, they were so poetic in the way they described

their ideas and everything they came up with was so unique, it amazed me, and so did the Korean culture experiences. We went up a beautiful mountain and had Korean shaved ice cream, went to a shopping district, went to a Korean karaoke room with our theater teen friends, and ventured into the busy streets of shops and ice cream bars almost every night.

On the final rehearsal at the theatre before our performance, I realised that it was coming to an end and that we were flying back home in a matter of two days, but I had no time to sit around and think about leaving because we had work to do, and work is what we did. We rehearsed our cues and positions and got ourselves lined up to get ready to enter into the theatre through the back of the audience. A video montage played to introduce us as a cast and seeing the pictures of us working with the Koreans made me so happy, the expressions on all our faces, in concentration, deep thought and realisation of great ideas, made me acknowledge how lucky I was to be there and experience with them. The adrenaline was pumping as we delivered the work we had produced through a short but energetic explosion of fun.

When it was over, we had pizza and fried chicken and reflected back on the experience with the teens and the Korean and British adults. We made small speeches amongst ourselves explaining what the experience meant to us, and when it got to me, I felt so overwhelmed by emotion and sadness of it being our last time with them and I wanted to explain how I have grown as a person, and matured through flying to a foreign country and been able to survive without my parents, which is more than a lot of people at the age of 15 can say. The experience of such a foreign and fascinating culture has shown me that there is so much to discover in the world that I haven't yet found, and I honestly can't wait until I'm at the age and have the means to travel to the same extent as I did to Korea because this trip has left me wanting to discover so much more in the world. I have made great friends that I'm still in touch with through packages and online every week even after a month of leaving them.



It has been an experience that has opened my eyes to a world of opportunity and makes me really happy that wonderful and rare experiences like this are happening because it's an experience that is priceless and life changing. Before the trip, I was quite sure that I wanted to have a career in the theatre



and now I have no doubt that I will pursue this in life. My dad says to thank god, my mum says to thank the theatre company but I don't think saying thank you can express the gratitude that I feel for every single person involved with this project, especially those who lived with us for the duration of the stay, it has accelerated my love for the theatre and I am extremely grateful for that.

Harsimran Kaur [Hamstead Hall Academy]

Comment on the Visit

Being able to have the chance to go to a new country, and help to create a piece of theatre with their National Theatre Company, it has been an unforgettable experience, that has helped me to easily adjust to different cultures, and gave me an insight on how the theatre create new plays. Even now, heading back home, I still cannot believe that any of this has happened, even being able to make new friends and connections with people across the globe. I feel as if the things I have been able to do in South Korea I possibly would not have done back home, which makes me really grateful.

Destiny Sond [Queensbridge School]



My Report



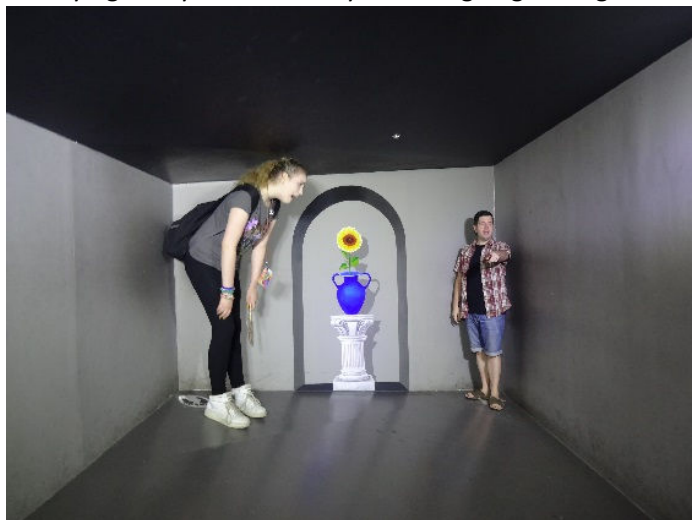
So, I'm going to be talking about one of the best experiences of my life. I could talk for days about Korea, the teenagers, the beautiful culture – everything. But I can't. So, here's my brief write-up about Hanyong Young Theatre Company.

I remember I was in Drama class with my best friend at school, and my drama teacher was telling us that 5 people would have the chance to go to a 2 day workshop (during school, which was pretty much the best news you could give a student). Then she mentioned that also 1 of the 5 students would be given the chance to go to South Korea for 12 days with two other students from two other schools from Birmingham. At that moment I thought to myself. "That person is going to be me." As a typical moody teenager, I used to lack the motivation. But the second I heard the news of a chance of a lifetime by going to South Korea, I picked myself up and tried my hardest to get that spot, and do you know what? It worked. My dream had come true... I was going to Korea!

Usually –and you can ask anyone this– I am hard work to wake up in the morning. But the second that alarm clock buzzed, I jumped out of bed with a massive smile on my face. It was that morning. The morning I was going to travel to the other side of the world and perform in such a beautiful and cultured country. I put on my make-up, which is my essential daily routine, and set off in the car with my mom. As we were driving along, my favourite song came on (The Killers – Exitlude) which was ironically relevant to my departure and as it played, me and my mom shed a tear. We then pulled up at the airport and waited for the other two girls, Harsimran and Destiny, and also our pretty much adoptive dad, Daniel. When they arrived I told my mom not to come in because I knew that if she came in to drop my bags off, we would both have cried rivers.

We were finally in South Korea. It was like a dream – but it was all so real. When we arrived we had two amazing helper's courtesy of the Hanyoung Young Company (Korea) to take us anywhere we want in Seoul. They were called Sunyoung (Translator) and Deungwon (guide). You pronounce 'Deung' like 'Tung', but me and my friend Harsimran thought he said 'Ting'. Throughout the whole holiday we called him Ting. So, Sunyoung and Ting for 2 amazing days took us around Seoul before we started the workshops with the Korean teenagers.

The day of meeting the Korean teenagers for the first time was a tough one for me. Overall, I am a shy person and I find it hard to talk to new people, whether they speak the same language or not. But I kept on saying to myself that everyone was going through the same thing that I was. At first, before we



there was no care in the world and where you could just be yourself.



started the workshop I found it slightly awkward. However when the 'Icebreaker games' began I started to feel more relaxed and I began to enjoy myself talking and interacting with the Korean's. As usual, time flies by and it was break time. We all sat down in a dressing room together and food was provided by one of the Korean's mom with pizza... and a bag of chilies. Before you knew it all the boys were eating the chilies, which was hilarious to watch because their faces turned bright red. I felt like I was back in primary school, where

The fact that there would be a language barrier between us had always scared me. But in actual fact we didn't need to speak the same language, because we all had a common connection which was our love for theatre. We were all just the same, teenagers with the same problems, the same angsts, but we were united by the workshops. During the workshops, we performed and exchanged ideas for creating our piece to perform.



Saturday was the big day, when all our hard work will pay off. After endless rehearsals and changes, we finished with a bang. Something special that we will all remember. When we were performing I had so much adrenaline and enjoyed performing to an audience, and it all came to an end too quickly for my liking. I wanted to perform again and again and again, but I knew we couldn't. We had finished. Officially this was our last day seeing the Korean teenager's, but because we grew such a great connection over the past few days, we decided we

should celebrate with Karaoke. And coffee. And shopping. But before all of that, after our performance we went into a room to celebrate with the adults with ice cream, cake, chicken! After we ate, we all had to make speeches. But when it came to me... well let's just say I was an emotional wreck. I cried so much, for quite a long time because I knew that my time in Korea was coming to an end. That I wouldn't see these lovely people again. It really affected me and it was hard to leave them all because they are my Korean family. We all hugged and said our goodbyes, and then more people burst in to tears. I guess it wasn't just me who found it hard to say goodbye. As sad as it was to leave, it was great knowing that I'm leaving as a new person. This whole experience has changed me for the better, I have grown in confidence, I have travelled to a new country and experienced and lived a new culture. I feel I have grown as an individual and I hope as a performer, too. I am so grateful for this chance of a lifetime and want to thank everybody involved from the UK and Korea for this opportunity of a lifetime.

Camsamida. (It means thank you in Korean)

Bella Black
Swanshurst School

