

K-Theatre - What's Fostering Downstage in the Korean Peninsula [Soovin's Interview]

I usually work in commercial musical theater like I work for what I actually do is I translate shows into Korea and I also am part of all sorts of original musical Korean musicals.

And I'm also developing my own piece so it's the whole package, I guess, in terms of bringing bringing overseas shows into Korea there are a lot of, there's a lot of work to do, including localizing Of course translating and so many just compromises

and you know, just making the show, suitable for the country like that's not lazy i guess i. That's what I do. Yeah.

And just like what I recently did was, what I did, Beetlejuice very recently.

Other projects you might know would be rent.

More earlier projects would include Jacqueline high Dream Girls, or I did my fair lady at some point, just a crazy show to do in Korea.

Sneaking says and I did everybody talking about Jamie and Lizzie you know Lizzie there's a musical called busy, one of the smaller ones and gentlemen sky to love and murder.

So those are just some of the projects that I've been involved in the past 15 years yeah.

now.

of course, like, there are a lot of cases how we do it like sometimes we, we have four productions of course truck productions are literally having the, the tortilla coming to Korea, and I would make the, the subtitles I would do the subs for it.

And we'll have, we'll have the other, the original actors or the tour team play it actually and then they would have a subtitle screen next to it. Right, so that's that's one way to do it and the other way is this the license that you license to show,

Korean actors do it, we cast it here, we change this, we localize the script. And then we sing it. Sing it and act it out in our language so that's the other way to do it.

In terms of if we're talking about life.

whatever shows that we want to create here so I guess that would be the big three categories how you do shows here.

Well that's that's the that's the thing that we, our industry has been doing for the last, that's something that's been more pocketing popular for the last, last last couple of years, because we were usually more prone to bring shows in like take the

the mechanized shows and bringing them in but now we're like, Hey, we can do our own stuff and now let's you know let's export them let's let's get them out of the country so last shows, of course, China and Japan are are our new main customers, that's

the right word of being so like commercial but yes new people, new audiences customer is not the right word, I'm being like, sorry.

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Yeah, anyway.

Are you audience who are those kind of local those kind of international markets and of course, and of course people the producers and trying to I've been talking with a producer yesterday so I'm like, so producer you right now, trying to get that up.

Yeah.

And of course they're trying to, they're everywhere. Everybody wants to go to Robbie, like they want to make shows here and then they want to bring it to Broadway so a lot of people try to do that so I guess like one of the earlier attempts were the last

Empress, one of the, there's a musical called the last opportunity here in Korea and that those were like the earlier attempts of Korean musicals trying to infiltrate through the American market which was not that successful but that was a it was one

of the earlier attempts I could say, and there are also cases like a combination of a Korean Korean American writer and an American composer those kinds of combination of the creators also open up also open up the opportunity to to try the American market.

So, yeah, we're in the, we're in the zone we're in the process, though, there's so many shows these these just pouring out and some of the quality of the shows are just so poor and clumsy some of the shows that like top fast but even though the production

quality is top plus, this doesn't necessarily mean that the show itself is a good show great show so abundance yes it's crazy abundance and budgets are like going like 10 minutes, over, over 10.

million 20,000,030 millions and. And they're also shows that the smaller shows that are trying to find their own ways but largely. This is also something you might want to know.

There's the big musical the major musical market and there's the, the relatively smaller musical market, which could be compared to the Broadway market and the Off Broadway Off Broadway market so we all, I guess we all have that similar sentiments here

or the similar structure as how the Broadway shows develop, I guess, but the thing is that, I guess, states you guys could take the show and start from off off Broadway Broadway and maybe if it has chance moving to try it out to try out and other cities

in Korea.

We don't have we don't usually do try tryouts and other cities. Get Started sold first. So, I would say, doing workshops doing smallish doing a certain soon a smaller scale first and then moving into the big thing would also do that, but I just feel like

the the risk is higher because, plus we don't run the shows for too long, so it's only like two or three months, six months long and.

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And that's it. We don't do like we don't run the shows for like two years, or 10 years, or anything like that so I guess those are the primary difference that I could kind of go both on top of my head.

I kind of stuff.

I think that's a good question because, um, I guess there are many different kind of shows here like if you ask us a story is that if we follow if we try to stick to that kind of formulaic structure and are we are we that committed to it as the Americans

are, I think, the way they make musicals in the West is a little more, what I felt was simple and rigid and like really by the book.

And then we like to derive and we like to do crazy stuff. And sometimes, because we're still in the process and times are like, but we're finding our own voice and and our and our own style.

It's not as sophisticated, or it's not as flowing our mood as it should be.

but I feel like there's a,

there's much variety I think I mean, we're talking about bigger shows larger shows.

I'd say I'm quite disappointed I'm quite I'm quite suffering in the mannerism of how the mechanism of the shows are pretty much the same, like, yes. In that sense, but when you, when you watch developing smaller shows and more like none mate non nature

shows different, so to speak, those shows up more possibilities and, in terms of finding new, new formulaic structures or new directions so they're both, I mean we have vehicle I'm sure like it's the same states right bigger shows have more simpler structures

or more popular structure, so to speak, and smaller shows they try something new, try something that's that hasn't been done before. So, in that case I guess we could say it's kind of similar to.

Uh huh.

Uh huh.

Really so that's interesting because our audience are growing younger now, our audience like let's say this this industry hasn't been around for too long, and we, we love ourselves some song and music.

So the audience is typically growing younger and of course with the influence of capable, we use.

We

were trying to use music that's more.

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What's the word, that's more appealing to a younger audience and those are the attempts that are being being in the, that's in the process we're figuring that out and of course like the more traditional musical theatre, people would say, Oh, that's too

k Poppy and that's like, you know, that's not that's not musical to that's just to show with K pop music.

Just slather splattered into a form of a story. But, however, I think that's not right I think just exploring and discovering all kinds of possibilities with this art form I think that's great.

I'm personally kind of developing a show right now that's kind of a literally a keep up the musical musical.

But thing is that we're also trying to, because the audience is growing younger and because we are our content, a cultural content is is developing and evolving into all kinds of directions, in a good way.

Now we're trying to do there there are companies, they're trying to film the whole show and stream it online.

For each show right so now people are talking about putting cameras in the theater and like having a different comes in theater and streaming the whole content in real time, live.

So the other other audience in the world could you know do they could just some people click meta theater that's the word they using and trying to try to just stream it worldwide at the time that we're actually doing the show here and career for.

So if we have an eight o'clock show everybody in the world can see it at eight o'clock just, you know, click and log into it. Those kind of temps are being being done right now so that's pretty it's pretty interesting.

Right. And it's not just filming and streaming it, they're also talking about, oh, if you just film in and stream it at the tension of because you're changing the medium like you're not in the theater, and you want to see your favorite actor, that's all

great stuff but the medium itself has to be hipper you can't you have to you have to pimp it up right so now people are talking about. Oh, then what if we create like really cool videos and we can, in real time, edit them as we go right so we're talking

about banking like music video high quality videos and merging them into an actual, real time live show. You see what I'm saying.

So, even though you're watching a musical for certain scenes or certain numbers, you can you'll be watching like a music video quality ish seen by, by, by editing the, the actual show in real time and also using already recorded material.

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So it's a jumble, it's a bundle of all kinds of techniques and mechanisms and and mediums bundled in this one kind of art form we're trying to figure out that exploring that area of of this, of this, of this thing.

Sorry, I don't know how to wrap it up. So, but, but you see what i'm saying so it's not just because during the pandemic people knew like oh they realized, hey we are so doomed I mean people are, although we maintain to carry on via the scene.

It's a only 50% of the seat 70% of the seats if we're really barely even sometimes 30% of the seats but people, you know, we started to learn that this is not going to work.

If we're going to have another surge of other pandemic or whatever is going to come on just bring the audience's fear is not enough, you know, we got to get to them, we need to there we need to find a way to expand the possibilities are the potentials

of this medium.

So, um, if you ask me that's the that's literally the latest thing that's happening here in the Korean musical scene, even here that's not that's not a major agenda you like to the more traditional people or the more classical people, that's the word

are saying, Oh, no, you got to watch fear in the theater so I mean it was just right. That's right. But also, discovering for other possibilities, like, something like that.

I just explained is very interesting for me because I also come from a film and television background so this is literally a, a we're standing on the brink of a very new kind of medium art form.

Or if you want to say it this way, entertainment product.

So for personally for me, I am going through projects I'm kind of working on projects that are trying to discovering those kind of possibilities, it's literally a pain in the ass but sorry.

Excuse My French. But, I think.

I think it's all very interesting it's all very it's crazy like I don't know what's going on but things are changing so fast Let's close the quickly. So, yeah, called.

It's called Ico in my last sentence.

I guess like, I don't know. Am I allowed to say this, like, I guess.

Anyway, it's it's a two people show it's a two person show. It's 200.

And it's, um, I recently got to participate participate into this project, and this through this company who who's very who's their thing, is making shows like this, although via the actual in a dramaturgical aspect the shows are not that well made, but

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this person knows how to

to hire these cape up, talents, and then create a create an art form or create a musical, and then provide that into the world that's what she does well this person the CEO of this company company does well, so that's that's how that's how that's kind

of you from YouTube right so I'm learning through this process, it's just the recent project I'm participating in so I guess I'm talking about it. Yeah.

I don't know I'll talk about it yet because it might be.

It might be some so this is just, yeah.

That's more.

That's why one of the old school musicals like the real operatic old school musicals and try, try to knock on the door of the American industry but then, you know, really work out well so that's a very primitive example to us though like one of the.

Yeah, you know what I'm saying. Right.

Um, I guess it's thought he thought.

I know his name I kind of know his work I know what he did like didn't need to play that I watched anything new, I forgot about the name of it but, uh, yeah, I mean, I would say the in South Korea if you ask who's the most popular Western who works in

in South Korea I would say it's Frank wild war.

Because the most famous show.

And if you'd say musicals.

Hey, musicals who would show you want to go watch.

It's Jacqueline hide, like that's a popular show. It's a really popular show I'm not saying that.

How do I say this very sophisticated delicately.

They're great shows there are good shows that have good quality but you're talking about a popular show that's more approachable to the mass audience in average audience who want to go watch a prank wild horn show, I would say.

We're also influence of European musicals, that are grand and they, you know, that are very period PC or just operatic.

That's one side of the musical theater that's so.

And then for the mall more recent years now new shows like more popular shows a Kinky Boots, or

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fun shows I'm trying to think of example Catholic have it on top of my head, but the things that we like our salt, the average audience like ourselves, big huge fun spectacle musicals here, right.

And of course the theater more the more sophisticated theater people have their own thing like they, they, in the off Broadway scene they want to go watch this show about more heavier subjects or shows that have more sophisticated structures or music

or so and so. Right.

But I guess that's, that's what where we are right now in Frank wild when is still working very vigorously here, so that's that's that's that's the state of what's happening here.

But there are new talents like surging in right now and new companies or new like overseas influences, trying to work with Korean companies are developed shows because they think that the money's here.

So, yeah, that David in the home.

hasn't been quite, I mean, yeah, it's not like I wouldn't I wouldn't accept. We put my finger on his name if you asked me if she.

We put my finger on his name if you asked me if he. If you asked me if he's a Asian influence here i mean i population influence here, so I'm like, not, not really.

not to not to be rude though I was just, you know, I'm just blabbering about where I know so don't make anyone knows don't hurt anyone. Okay.

Don't talk about anything about cream is

your cool I mean

yeah you're cool.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

There is no union here, there is no system of union here it's just like, it's just you and you're just thrown out in the wilderness so you have to find your own way to survive here.

I recently kind of joined a, an agency.

So I don't know if that helps but not many people have the privilege to kind of have an agency to watch your back but even the agency that I'm in like, it's very earlier, early stage, even to discuss for writers slash translated to have an a so called

a thing so called agency, like, it's like, oh, so what's going on. What are you going to do for me and so far I think like.

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They took away 10% of a contract I recently made so. And I don't know if they actually did anything for me yet.

So, wow, Union that's, that's something we have here.

Right, yeah.

Yeah, I, you know, like here they all they pay all the money to the actors and that's that's the largest part of the actual production costs and budget, and a lot of people, aside from the top, a listed so called a list of actors.

Other people are.

They have to survive on a very minimal minimal wage so injustice everywhere.

Did that hurt you. I'm sorry that the fact that we don't have any Union.

I know.

Okay no enough to, to, like in Korea or for overseas.

you want to produce.

Use your own money that's the only thing I could say don't use your mic Oh hell no don't use your own money try to find a way to get the money.

Okay, your time to record the nice stuff I'll, I'll give you time to record the more genteel stuff that you could talk with people on the show with people with your class or so but just in general.

I have friends that will try to produce and shows and then because she was so passionate, she she she she got the money through debt. The Morgans the Scott alone.

And then she, she poured in all the money that she she earned through her life and then the show was a big flop.

And now she's sitting on a debt, a pile of that. So just don't do that that's very important financially don't put yourself in a privileged position where you can't you can't can't take care of yourself, right, because that's what I learned from from

seeing my couple of my friends like they're like, I'm gonna produce this time like, Okay, and then they're like, Oh, I'm sitting on a pile of data, what do I do so I'm like, Oh, I told you that wasn't good idea to use your own money so that's one of the

biggest things that I learned, if you want to carry on, you got to have the strength to carry on, but if you put yourself if you compromise your stuff like that, you'll get another chance.

So don't use other people's money to produce you that's that's that's something that I would that I always say if I see anyone like saying, oh I want to produce musicals like I have like, you know, I have like 5050 50,000 grants right now, it's not the

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right word I have 50 grands right now. So I can maybe produce this size of a musical but, no, you're going to spend more money than that, at the end of the day, so don't do that just take that money in.

use it wisely. So, probably that don't never ever ever ever produce with your own money. Okay.

As you asked me if I have I produced before I haven't produced before I, as I said, I don't.

Oh, yeah.

I think for me as a travelers writer position.

The hardest part is you want to, but they should approach this question from that aspect I should approach it from a producer's aspect,

dealing with people.

That's the hardest part, dealing with people getting the people to do something you want them to do that's, that's just impossible, like you want the show to steer the show this way.

Of course, the writer would say all but I don't like this because so and so and so and you have to talk with the actors and the accuracy. I don't like the script because this and this and this, then you have to go back to the writer and say, all the actors

like to change this part of this part of this but unless we can get the show on its feet that back and forth, you know, and just talking about every single person that every single department they all, everyone has an asshole, like, Okay, this is the

word, everyone has an opinion, everyone has an asshole just like an opinion is that the word, I don't know, something about like that it was just like opinion is like an apple everyone has one oh that's the word I think Yeah, right, everyone has one.

So, being in the middle of everything like that and mediating and just constantly, problem solving, problem solving problems. That's what you have to do.

Aside from constantly thinking is this is show that's gonna that's gonna bring something that's what that's going to bring a value or worth that I want to convey to the audience, and to keep that faith or idea from the beginning to the end is, that's

a very very huge task. So you want this story to be delivered to the audience but this like changes emerges and turns into something else is transformed and it ends up being like this right.

And is this something that you really wanted to do.

And that kind of, you know, questions you like, Why Why the hell am I even doing this right now. Once you realize that it was never going to be this, and then it became this, right.

So dealing with that kind of aspect of why it will Why am I even doing theatre Why am I telling the story. All I want to do is this kind of this is the are the audience is the audience going to like this.

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All that fighting the facts out and making the right choices, every single time like you're playing chess it's, it's like impossible and crazy right.

So, I

think that was like I'm personally like in one of the processes right now like that and it's just like so crazy and.

And I like.

On a side note, I just yesterday I went to the producers and the director had this huge fight I'm like, this is not right because this is like this and this and this and your taste is awful and all that kind of stuff right.

You think this is going to work.

And sometimes you have to be polite sometimes you have to just say, this ain't gonna work. You know I'm not going to do it if it's going to be like this.

So, you have to be a good.

I want to say fighter, but you have to have, you have to learn how to protect yourself and fight when you have to fight.

And that just consumes your soul so much, and then it comes back to the question, why do I even do this right, what's the deal like, why do I even start this so it's not about it guess everyone just wants to see a pretty show on a stage and nice beautiful

show on stage but in order to create that thing is just impossible.

So it's never going to turn out the way you want it to just, you know, just have to let it go, whether you want to, whether you want to just, oh well I'm going to tell this story.

Let it go, it's not going to be this can be something else at the end of day.

And whatever it is you just have to accept it.

Okay, it's going to be its own creature.

In terms of the story, in terms of the development process in terms of the people who are involved in it. Your baby's not going to be your baby again day.

Right.

and if you can be happy and you could be grateful and rejoice the process, in and of itself, with all those aspects thrown into it.

You know Does, does. Even if it's going to be the most pain in the ass in your life.

It is the pain in the ass of your life like, like, why do we even do this. Like so angry right because I had to fight yesterday. It's like what the hell I tried to do right. So, all that stuff.

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If you just be ready to embrace all that shit.

Right.

So, and of course, the finances to bless shows here they try to go for it they they put it up on its feet and you know you just have to call so early because you can't raise any money right, people are not calling.

And then you feel like what the hell have been doing for the last six months like.

Have I been masturbating, and then you're asking yourself.

And can you those processes, just be ready to humbly accept those changes and processes and peaks and valleys of your emotions, and I guess.

Yeah, don't, don't never try to try to expect a perfect production because there, that doesn't exist.

Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry I'm venting a little bit I guess but yeah it's all true.

I guess the other thing is, you don't get to work with the good people all the time and you don't get to there. You don't get to live your ideals for. I guess the workshop in part is actually the more fun part.

The workshopping part is the, the, that's the process where you can actually develop and discover the problems and discover and focus on the story itself right he's promising the story and focus on the piece and then.

And those are like, that's the fun part for me Actually, but the but the unfun part is a non domestic aspects of the offshore making.

So, but I guess I look you learn to tell yourself that oh you're, this is not this show, you're doing it for money.

But you you learn how to find the right amount of dignity to carry on and you tell yourself. You can fight for this, but you choose your battles right.

And sometimes, sometimes you learn and that you learned that you're wrong you are totally wrong and sometimes you got to let your soul right and being prepared for anything that just helps it I told myself, keep the expectations, low, just don't expect

anything, because anything can happen, right.

So, that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying more cynical these days.

The process of making, I guess the only time I kind of.

Yeah, I only the only time I kind of feel truly happy was recently was when I was in when I was developing my own piece and doing work doing the workshops, that's when you're like really having fun so enjoy all that when you can.

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I'm being so mean and like Lyft but really because your ideas that you talked about, and the science and scientific approaches and ideas that come from, I thought that was really cool and really interesting and really new.

And why not, why not discover a new possibilities in new fun shows a new, new themes and genres and materials to develop and.

And please please carry on with it when you while you still have the passion and the popper.

Yeah, please. I mean, I think what you just talked about those those tissues that you talked about that I think that was really interesting.

Yeah.

Yeah. Be prepared for anything BB stay open, in a way, I don't mean like only for good things but stay open like whatever may come your way.

It won't be what you you expect it to be, but it's okay you just you just push through you learn from it.

And whether it's a negative thing or whether it's a positive thing.

The show that you initially conceived won't be the show, at the end of the day, but be prepared to the it could be a good thing could be a bad thing but you just started its own creature once, once the idea is thrown out in the world, you have to just

watch how it grows and you can't try to control everything right.

Do the right battles to pick your fight to the right battles and don't produce with with your own money, never produced with your own movement,

Hey. Hi.

OK, So the first thing is, be prepared.

Be prepared for anything like stay open through the whole process.

The baby that you can try to put out to the world, the initial idea that you conceived won't be something that you imagined have imagined at the end of the day, be open stay open and be prepared for the weather it's a negative thing, what's the weather

it's a positive thing.

You just have to embrace it and you can't control everything so you have to believe that this new own creature will find its own way, to, to, to become something that you've never imagined them.

And secondly, this is the most important thing that I want to say for new upcoming producers theatre creators, don't produce with your own money. Never ever produced with your own money, you raise the funds, you do not use your own pocket milk money.

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Okay, that's it.