In-Seok Chappell

THE FREE9
The Free9

In-Sook Chappell
Foreword

The Free9 by In-Sook Chappell was part of Connections 2018, along with nine other brilliant plays.

Connections is the National Theatre’s annual, nationwide youth theatre festival, and is a celebration of youth theatre, new writing, and partnership, highlighting the importance of access for young people to the arts. Every year Connections offers a unique opportunity to over 7,000 participants via their youth theatres and school theatre groups to stage new plays written specifically for young people. Companies have the chance to work on texts by some of the most exciting contemporary professional playwrights, and then to perform them in one of thirty Partner Theatre Festivals hosted by leading theatres across the UK.

We ask the Connections playwrights to write plays that enable the young performers to explore, embrace and increase their understanding of the world. To assist the writers in this goal, all the plays are road tested in bespoke development workshops with Connections companies, thereby ensuring relevance and resonance as the young people feedback directly to the playwright.

The Connections Festival culminates with performances of each of the ten plays at the National Theatre. In the summer of 2018, Jacksons Lane’s Transmission youth company were invited to perform their production of The Free9 in the National’s Dorfman Theatre.
Preface

I wrote this play in response to the heartbreak and anger I felt at the true story of the Laos 9 and the world that failed them and continues to fail children seeking refuge. It struck a personal chord because I myself arrived in Britain as a young child in only the clothes I stood up in, and was extended compassion and the chance to belong.

I wanted to tell a specific North Korean story that was accessible and felt universal. For the most part East Asians have been invisible, erased and culturally appropriated from British stages and screens. When it comes to professional productions the casting must be actors of an East Asian background playing the East Asian roles. However, *The Free9* was written for young people (initially for the National Theatre Connections) to study and perform. As the Korean author I am giving you permission to inhabit and play these characters. It isn’t whitewashing and race appropriation if you aren’t taking a job from a professional East Asian actor. You may be in a predominantly white, Black or South Asian community or a single-sex school, in which case make the play work for you.

For me, the point of youth theatre is play, imagination, empathy and feeling yourself in someone else’s shoes. Although it is tough subject matter, I hope you have fun reading, experimenting, taking risks and letting your imagination run wild in the performing of this play. I believe that drama can make individual worlds a little bigger and foster unity through greater understanding and compassion.

*In-Sook Chappell*
The Free9

This play is inspired by the Laos 9:

It is dedicated to them and all the forgotten inside North Korea.

However, the characters in this play are fictional, works of the playwright’s imagination
Characters

THE NINE
Poppy, boy, seventeen
Blade, boy, sixteen
Moon, boy, eighteen
Ice, boy, eighteen
Rat, girl, masquerading as a boy, fourteen
Big Brother, boy, nineteen
Sunny, girl, fifteen
Jia, girl, fifteen
Mini, girl, fourteen

Chorus, of The Forgotten, the han-ridden
The chorus can be played by as few as three with no upper limit. The chorus also play all characters other than the nine.

Setting
North Korea, China and Laos.

Language
In English with the performers’ natural accents. When Korean words and phrases are used they should be pronounced correctly.

Note
Han is inherent in Korean character and has no direct English translation. It is a deep emotion of collective and personal sorrow, rage, helplessness and resilience born of a history of oppression and suffering.
Scene One

North Korea. Near future.


A female News Anchor dressed in a hanbok (traditional Korean dress) and heavy make-up.

Climactic notes heralding a news programme.

News Anchor Welcome to the eight o’clock news on KCTV. The following speech is declamatory and highly dramatic.

Let us never forget that our Great Leader Kim Jong-un is our loving and benevolent mother.

The Nine enter. They are dressed in school uniform: white shirts, grey trousers or skirts.

News Anchor Nine North Korean kotchebi, vulnerable orphans, who were kidnapped by the South Korean puppet regime have today been returned to the bosom of their motherland.

The Nine stand in a semi-circle.

News Anchor The evil regime promises much but had these children arrived in the South they would have been tortured for information and then executed.

The Nine bow.

The Nine We give thanks to our Great Marshall for rescuing us and his Kimist love, generosity and forgiveness.

Music swells and they start to sing ‘You are Mother’.

The Cast

Taking care of the sons and daughters of this land.

The Party shows its motherly love to them.

New strength of love is in your great heart.