

CHOIR BOY

BY TARELL ALVIN
McCRANEY

★ Broadway Edition

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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For Saleem

The Broadway premiere of CHOIR BOY was produced by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on December 12, 2018. It was directed by Trip Cullman; the scenic and costume designs were by David Zinn; the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski; the original music and sound design were by Fitz Patton; the original music, music direction, and vocal arrangements were by Jason Michael Webb; the choreography was by Camille A. Brown; and the production stage manager was Narda E. Alcorn. The cast was as follows:

HEADMASTER MARROW	Chuck Cooper
PHARUS JONATHAN YOUNG	Jeremy Pope, Jonathan Burke
MR. PENDLETON	Austin Pendleton
BOBBY MARROW	J. Quinton Johnson
JUNIOR DAVIS	Nicholas L. Ashe
ANTHONY JUSTIN “AJ” JAMES	John Clay III
DAVID HEARD	Caleb Eberhardt
ENSEMBLE	Daniel Bellomy, Jonathan Burke, Gerald Caesar, Marcus Gladney

CHOIR BOY was originally presented by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) in a co-production with Alliance Theater (Susan V. Booth, Artistic Director), at City Center Stage II in New York City, opening on July 2, 2013. It was directed by Trip Cullman, the set and costume designs were by David Zinn, the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski, the sound design was by Fitz Patton, the music direction and vocal arrangements were by Jason Michael Webb, and the production stage manager was Kyle Gates. The cast was as follows:

HEADMASTER MARROW	Chuck Cooper
PHARUS JONATHAN YOUNG	Jeremy Pope
MR. PENDLETON	Austin Pendleton
BOBBY MARROW	Wallace Smith
JUNIOR DAVIS	Nicholas L. Ashe
ANTHONY JUSTIN “AJ” JAMES	Grantham Coleman
DAVID HEARD	Kyle Beltran

CHOIR BOY received a world premiere co-production by The English Stage Company and Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) at the Royal Court Theatre in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs on September 4, 2012.

CHOIR BOY was originally commissioned by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer; Daniel Sullivan, Acting Artistic Director 2007–08 Season) with support from Time Warner Inc.

CHARACTERS

HEADMASTER MARROW, Late 30s/early 40s man of color. Is the youngest and latest headmaster for the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. He is paternal Uncle to Bobby Marrow.

PHARUS JONATHAN YOUNG, Late teens. An effeminate young man of color. Begins the play a junior at the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys and the lead of the school's famous choir. He is roommates with AJ James.

MR. PENDLETON, Late 60s/70s, white male. Professor at the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys.

BOBBY MARROW, Mid to late teens, a young man of color. Is a junior at the Charles R. Drew Prep School, and member of the school's choir. He is also nephew to Headmaster Marrow.

JUNIOR DAVIS, Teenage young man of color. Junior at the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. He is a member of the school's choir.

ANTHONY JUSTIN "AJ" JAMES, Late teens, athletic young man of color. Senior at the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. He is a member of the school's choir and the school's baseball team. He is roommates with Pharus Young.

DAVID HEARD, Late teens, a young man of color. Senior at the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys. He is a member of the school's choir.

PLACE

Charles R. Drew Preparatory School for Boys

TIME

A school year, last year.

CHOIR BOY

The stage is spare, it holds all that one needs to believe that in this time and space a story about Young Boys growing into Men can happen.

GRADUATION

A light warms on Headmaster Marrow standing proud, majestic, in his ceremonial graduation robes.

HEADMASTER. Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends for those of you new to our assembly. It is my distinct honor and privilege to welcome you to the 49th Commencement for the Charles R. Drew Preparatory School for Boys.

And now, to call in our graduating class, next year's choir lead, Mr. Pharus Jonathan Young.

Pharus steps forward and sings "Trust and Obey," the school's song. With this commencement begins. And with the swell of sound from Pharus' voice and the echoing calls of "ooh" from the choir, the graduates begin to assemble like a well-oiled ceremony behind Pharus, save for a pair of choir members that we may not notice, laughing and giggling in the back.

PHARUS.

*When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey,*

BOBBY. Sissy.

PHARUS.

For there's no other way

BOBBY. Sissy.

PHARUS.

To be happy in Jesus,

BOBBY. Dis sissy.

PHARUS.

But to trust and—

BOBBY. This faggot ass Nigga.

Pharus has stopped. He turns upstage behind him, swiftly, as if distracted or horrified by something. The boys in the choir all stand stock-still. Pharus then turns around, stares forward at everyone in the audience. He gives a confident smile, vowing to avenge this moment.

The headmaster notices. Pharus continues.

PHARUS.

But to trust and obey!

Shift.

AN OFFICE

HEADMASTER. I have never seen anything quite like it!

PHARUS. Headmaster—

HEADMASTER. Every head snapped back from the seniors walking in, gallantly, Stridently, with pride and—Stop, dropped, turned around and looked at you.

PHARUS. Sir?

HEADMASTER. You!

Standing there NOT singing, not doing what I asked—what I selected you to do! And I said it, I reminded you at rehearsal, didn't I, Pharus, I said no matter what, if th' ground opens up and swallows the stage whole, do not stop singing the school song, son, until every student is gathered Seated on that stage. What'd you say then?

PHARUS and HEADMASTER. “Why?”

HEADMASTER. Jesus Hold My Hand! I should have known right Then!

I get it Pharus, you wanna test things; Curious with a capital C but then was not the time to be...

PHARUS. Sir, I know better—

HEADMASTER. Then why

After I asked you not to, told you “you couldn’t,” Made you understand the tradition, pointed out its Potency, did you get up there at the seniors’ graduation, A day that should afford them every rite and ritual

Of the ceremony, and mess up their moment. Why?

PHARUS. I... Would you rather be feared or respected, Headmaster?

HEADMASTER. Pharus!

PHARUS. It keeps me up at night.

HEADMASTER. It does not.

PHARUS. (*Moving ahead.*) Maybe I am curious—what’d you say?

HEADMASTER. Son!

PHARUS. “With a Capital C”? ’Cause see

If you’re *respected* people give you space

But if they *fear* you, they jumpin’ back off of curbs...

HEADMASTER. Are yah homesick with a capital H? Because that’s where you’re going, and not just for summer break. Permanently. There were a few faces out there just now, Pharus, mad enough to strip your scholarship.

PHARUS. I earned that scholarship and that spot in singing, sir— You said.

HEADMASTER. Then you need to give me some answers I could say out loud. Did you get nervous or—

PHARUS. I am a professional.

HEADMASTER. Something caught in your throat?

PHARUS. (*Referring to his throat.*) This the Lord’s passageway, let no follicle formed against me prosper.

HEADMASTER. Bwoi!

PHARUS. I got—I did... I was distracted.

HEADMASTER. By?

PHARUS. All of the pomp and circumstance and noise and... I was overwhelmed and in “awe” of my dear school Thinking soon and very soon this, those graduating, that will be me.

HEADMASTER. Is that a lie?

PHARUS. Sir!

If there is nothing I want to do is be and act as a Drew man should. I do not lie.

And I do not snitch.

HEADMASTER. What? Huh. So...

So someone...distracted you?

Beat.

Someone was talking to you onstage?

PHARUS. *To me?*

HEADMASTER. About you... Calling you...

PHARUS. Everything but a child of God. And I'm sorry, sir, I— Jumped, sir, but luckily not too far.

I heard that whisper and I didn't answer back I just Kept on singing.

And everything worked out alright, Right? In the end it was all of four, five seconds?

HEADMASTER. Huh. I'm... Huh. I see.

PHARUS. I was voted next year's choir lead, almost unanimously, you hear?

HEADMASTER. That's quite an honor, a privilege. At least, it was in my day.

PHARUS. I know, I'm ready, I want you to be proud too, sir.

HEADMASTER. That choir means a lot to this school. We've relied on its support since...

PHARUS. (*By rote.*) Founded by the second headmaster who heard a group of boys singing in the showers, and decided to use a choir to gain attention and financial support For the Little All-Boys School That Could.

Why the Headmaster was close enough to hear them boys singing
in the showers

I'll never know!

HEADMASTER. Pharus...

PHARUS. But that was olden times,
People was just more closer then, I guess.

HEADMASTER. Pharus.

PHARUS. Sir?

Pharus' wrist goes limp.

Headmaster looks and corrects Pharus' limp wrist.

HEADMASTER. Tighten up! You are lead now. Out in front and
I...I think that's right, Pharus. I do. I think you should be, but you
gotta tighten up so that people don't assume too much. Like all
men, hold some things in. See your private life... Well those are
private. Don't let it all out. Keep 'em guessing or... At least so they
can't ask. Now...

I need to speak to the student who was...calling you Things on the
choir stand.

PHARUS. I can't say.

HEADMASTER. I...right. I know you don't want to be a stool
pigeon...

PHARUS. Ha! Oh Headmaster you're so Columbo; "stool pigeon"?

HEADMASTER. Who was it, Pharus?

PHARUS. You know the rule

A Drew man doesn't tell on his brother,

HEADMASTER and PHARUS. "He allows him the honor to confess
himself?"

PHARUS. It may seem silly but ever since I was a little boy I've
wanted to grow up and be a Drew man.

Besides God don't like ugly; *they* won't get away with it.

HEADMASTER. They?

PHARUS. Have a good summer, Headmaster.

Shift.

CHOIR BOY

by Tarell Alvin McCraney

7 men

The Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys is dedicated to the creation of strong, ethical black men. Pharus wants nothing more than to take his rightful place as leader of the school's legendary choir. Can he find his way inside the hallowed halls of this institution if he sings in his own key?

"The sweet harmonies of classic spirituals unite the sometimes fractious voices of the young men in CHOIR BOY...but when they raise their voices in unison, they offer a glimpse of a world in which the cruelty that can divide and destroy is dissolved in a graceful, embracing order. [An] affecting and honest portrait...of a gay youth tentatively beginning to find the courage to let the truth about himself become known."

—The New York Times

"Believe the buzz. CHOIR BOY, the small but mighty coming-of-age play by Tarell Alvin McCraney deserves its kudos. [The play] captures the bristling tensions at a prestigious prep school for African American boys when a flamboyantly gay youth is named leader of their celebrated gospel choir."

—Variety

"In his stirring and stylishly told drama, Tarell Alvin McCraney cannily [explores] race and sexuality and the graces and gravity of history."

—New York Daily News

Also by Tarell Alvin McCraney
THE BROTHERS SIZE
IN THE RED AND BROWN WATER
MARCUS; OR THE SECRET
OF SWEET

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

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