

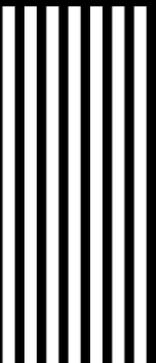


# CHURCH

BY  
YOUNG JEAN LEE



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



CHURCH  
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*For my mother,  
Inn-Soo Lee*

CHURCH premiered in 2007 at Performance Space 122 in New York. It was directed by Young Jean Lee, the set design was by Eric Dyer, the lighting design was by Mark Barton, the costume design was by Normandy Sherwood, the sound design was by Matthew Tierney, and the choreography was by Faye Driscoll. The cast was as follows:

REVEREND JOSÉ ..... Greg Hildreth  
REVEREND KARINNE ..... Karinne Keithley  
REVEREND WEENA ..... Weena Pauly  
REVEREND KATIE ..... Katie Workum  
CHOIR DIRECTOR ..... Anna Shapiro  
SOLOIST ..... Megan Stern

CHURCH was remounted in 2008 at the Public Theater in New York, co-produced Young Jean Lee's Theater Company and Timothy Childs, with the same creative team. The cast was as follows:

REVEREND JOSÉ ..... Brian Bickerstaff  
REVEREND KARINNE ..... Katy Pyle  
REVEREND WEENA ..... Weena Pauly  
REVEREND KATIE ..... Katie Workum  
CHOIR DIRECTOR ..... Stephanie Pistello  
SOLOIST ..... Megan Stern

CHURCH was co-produced by Young Jean Lee's Theater Company, the Vienna Festival 2008, the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, and Performance Space 122.

CHURCH was a National Performance Network Creation Fund Project co-commissioned by Walker Art Center, in partnership with The Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe, and the National Performance Network.

CHURCH was developed through the Artists in Residence program at Brooklyn Arts Exchange.

## **CHARACTERS**

REVEREND JOSÉ

REVEREND [KARINNE]

REVEREND [WEENA]

REVEREND [KATIE]

CHOIR DIRECTOR

SOLOIST

## **NOTE ON PERFORMANCE STYLE**

The performers are natural and sincere at all times. They should come across as real Christians who are doing an actual church service. They are unpretentious and appealing and never seem fake, pushy, or creepy. The performers address the entire audience, looking around from face to face and not letting anyone escape what they're saying. Reverend José in particular likes to hold the audience captive, pacing around and sometimes singling people out and pointing at them as he speaks. Everyone speaks with total conviction—we believe that they believe what they're saying, no matter how bizarre their language becomes. The four reverends are good friends and acknowledge each other in supportive ways whenever possible (for example, when they pass each other during transitions). The Female Reverends should be named after whoever is playing them, but Reverend José is always Reverend José.

# CHURCH

*The audience enters the theater in silence. There is a simple wooden pulpit downstage center and two plain wood benches upstage on either side of the pulpit.*

*A Sacred Harp song, like “Sherburne” by the Alabama Sacred Harp Singers, begins as the lights abruptly cut out.\**

*The song plays in the darkness. The singers’ voices seem to come from everywhere, overwhelming the audience with their raw power.*

*The song ends.*

*Reverend José begins speaking in the dark, from behind the audience.*

REVEREND JOSÉ. Once upon a time, there was a young man who worried about a great many things.

He worried about money. He worried about having too much to do and not enough time. He worried about his health. He worried about his future. He worried about saying the wrong thing. He worried about being a hypocrite.

He woke up in the morning and his brain swam around in a fish-bowl of worry until he fell asleep at night.

And the Lord said to him, “My child, open your eyes! Your world is as small as a speck of sand.”

And the young man replied, “I am complicated. I am deep. I am a good person. I am sufficient.”

*Pause.*

This is you.

\* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

You may not think this is you, but in fact you are incredibly similar to all the people sitting around you right now. The vast majority of them are doomed to a life of disappointing mediocrity just like yours. And everyone sees how you yearn fruitlessly for glory when it is clearly already too late, and they pity you. They pity you as a grasping failure who pants for degrading miserable straws that are out of your reach.

And for those of you who have achieved some measure of pitiful worldly success, you look like fools! People laugh at you behind your back for the self-important way you speak, your pretensions, the way you ingratiate yourselves with the powerful. You are a buffoon who pretends that you don't care what anyone thinks of you, when in fact you writhe in ecstasy like a fondled dog each time a sycophantic half-wit praises your name.

Moreover, your popularity is already beginning to decline. You keep trotting out the same tricks again and again and you know deep in your heart that much of what you are doing is worthless trash, but you desperately cobble it together and present it to your clientele and some of them say, "Hey, I like this!" which enables you to limp pridefully towards your next pointless endeavor.

And let me not forget the most vainglorious among you: the quitters—who expected success without struggle and so quit to avoid disappointment.

All of you, you failures and successes and quitters, are deluded babies who believe that the world has yet to recognize your true greatness, when in fact you are a hanging piece of meat deteriorating towards sickness and death!

This is sin! This is sin, I tell you! You are sinning RIGHT NOW!

You sit there like pigs, stuffed fat with self-interest and anxiety. Your squinting eyeballs can barely protrude! YOU ARE A SPIRITUAL BLACK HOLE! Your spiritual bankruptcy is reflected in your endlessly repeating conversations about your struggles to quit smoking, quit drinking, quit junk food, quit caffeine, quit unsatisfying jobs and relationships—and this is what you talk about when you are trying to be deep! You claim to care about suffering in the world and take luxurious pleasure in raging against the perpetrators of that

suffering, but this masturbation-rage helps nothing and no one!

You who are overworked and stressed out! You who are trapped on the hamster wheel! You who burn with jealousy and bitterness! You for whom the glories of your former years are beginning to flame out and die! You who use alcohol and drugs and nicotine to numb your anxiety! YOU WHO FEEL THAT YOU ARE TOO FAT!

Let go.

Let go of these superficial earthly ties and deliver yourself in humility to the Lord.

He will open your eyes to the vast world! He will melt away the selfish pigfat from your face until your eyes stand forth true and clear!

For all of you Pharisees out there, I preach to you knowing that you may not heed my word. You will continue in your sin of obsessing and complaining and spending too much money. But the day will come in which the Lord God Almighty comes in a shining blaze of glory, and the knowledge of your shallow heart will cause you to bite through your own tongue with grief.

*“Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho,” performed by a singer like Mahalia Jackson, plays as lights fade up on Reverend Karinne, Reverend Weena, and Reverend Katie entering and walking towards the audience.*

*They walk into the audience, greeting the audience members. They wear pretty dresses with full skirts. Reverend Karinne wears a yellow dress, Reverend Weena wears a pink dress, and Reverend Katie wears a blue dress. Each dress is slightly different in style from the others.*

*Reverend José enters the audience from the back, where he delivered his opening monologue, and begins greeting people.*

*All four performers are genuinely warm and friendly. As the song winds down, they make their way onto the stage. Reverend Katie sits stage left and Reverend Weena and Reverend José sit stage right. Reverend Karinne remains bent down talking to some people in the front row.*

*The song ends.*

*Reverend Karinne stands.*

# CHURCH

by Young Jean Lee

1M, 3W

Acclaimed playwright and director Young Jean Lee transforms her life-long struggle with Christianity into an exuberant church service. Both celebratory and confrontational, CHURCH will test the expectations of religious and non-religious alike—looking deep into why we believe what we believe.

*"[Lee's] slyly subversive drama ambushes its audience with an earnest and surprisingly moving Christian church service that might be the most unlikely provocation produced in years. ...the point here is not to convert so much as to confront. Ms. Lee has a talent for evocative and sometimes grotesque imagery, and on the attack she is at the height of her powers."*

—**The New York Times**

*"...Lee's writing displays her customary surgical precision and menace, a rhetorically supple mix of invective and goofiness. And while she uses parable and drops the odd Biblical phrase...she seems more intent on roasting her audience's secular complacency than blaspheming or exposing the machinery of belief..."*

—**Time Out (New York)**

**Also by Young Jean Lee**  
STRAIGHT WHITE MEN

ISBN 978-0-8222-3598-9



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