

THE TOTAL BENT

TEXT BY

STEW

MUSIC BY

STEW AND

**HEIDI
RODEWALD**



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE TOTAL BENT
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THE TOTAL BENT was originally produced in New York by the Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director). It was directed by Joanna Settle; the choreography was by David Neumann; the musical direction was by Marty Beller; the scenic design was by Andrew Lieberman; the costume design was by Gabriel Berry; the lighting design was by Thom Weaver; the sound design was by Obadiah Eaves and Sten Severson; and the hair and wig design was by Cookie Jordan. The cast was as follows:

PAPA JOE ROY	Vondie Curtis Hall
MARTY ROY	Ato Blankson-Wood
STEW, GUITAR	Stew
HEIDI, BASS	Heidi Rodewald
DEACON CHARLIE	Kenny Brawner
ABEE	Curtis Wiley
ANDREW	Jahi Kears
BYRON BLACKWELL	David Cale
DEACON DENNIS	Damian Lemar Hudson
SAXOPHONE	Brad Mulholland
TRUMPET	John Blevins
DRUMS	Marty Beller

CHARACTERS

PAPA JOE ROY

MARTY ROY

STEW

HEIDI

DEACON CHARLIE

ABEE

ANDREW

BYRON BLACKWELL

DEACON DENNIS

BAND (GUITAR, BASS, SAXOPHONE, TRUMPET, DRUMS)

THE TOTAL BENT

Dexter Avenue Hall Recording Studio. Papa Joe Roy eases into the spotlight and stands before a gleaming gold microphone and sings.

“That’s Why”

JOE.

HE FORGAVE MY SINS
AND THEN WE MADE AMENDS.
AND YOU KNOW, THAT’S WHY, THAT’S WHY,
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.
THAT’S WHY, THAT’S WHY,
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.

I DID SOME FUCKED UP SHIT
BUT HE FORGOT ABOUT IT.
AND YOU KNOW, THAT’S WHY, THAT’S WHY,
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.
THAT’S WHY, THAT’S WHY,
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.

MY BAD BEHAVIOR WAS PARDONED BY THE SAVIOR
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.
YOU GET THE PICTURE IT’S IN THE SCRIPTURE
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT WHITEY.

CALL ME A HYPOCRITE I AIN’T GOT TIME FO’ YO’ SHIT
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.
I USED TO BE A REBEL BUT NOW I PIMP SLAP THE DEVIL
THAT’S WHY HE’S JESUS AND YOU’RE NOT, WHITEY.

Stabs on verse/chorus changes.

YOU TRAP US IN GHETTOS
DRESS US IN CHAINS
USE CROSSES LIKE STILETTOS
AND DRIVE US HALF INSANE

GOT ME SOME CHRISTIAN CREDIT
AND ON THAT YOU CAN BET

I BEEN FORGIVEN FOR SINS
THAT I AIN'T COMMITTED YET

AND THE SIN ON MY LIST
IS HATEFUL AND WRONG
BUT AH'MA TAKE YOUR BLOOD
AND TURN IT INTO SONG

CUZ HE FORGAVE ME ~ BEFORE HE SAVED ME

ALL.

THAT'S WHY HE'S JESUS
AND YOU'RE NOT, WHITEY

JOE.

YOU THANK YOU BLESSED

ALL.

THAT'S WHY...

JOE.

BUT YOU POSSESSED

ALL.

THAT'S WHY HE'S JESUS AND YER NOT WHITEY

VEGAS ENDING!!!

THAT'S—WHYYYYYYYY

THAT'S—WHY—HYYYYYYY

THAT'S—WHY—HE'S—JE ~ SUS

AND—YOU'RE—NOT—WHI—TEEEEEEEYYYYYYYYYYY

Song ends.

Marty & Joe

Glaring in stunned disbelief at his son Marty, who sits smiling wickedly at him at the mixing console, Papa Joe Roy slowly shakes his head from side to side as Marty picks up a handheld mirror and starts plucking his eyebrows...

JOE. *(To audience.)* I am the Legendary Papa Joe Roy.

BAND. Amen!

JOE. And this is my mic.

BAND. HALLELUJAH!

JOE. And God likes things just the way they were.

MARTY. He didn't like that take. Let's try it again y'all!

JOE. (*Audience.*) Bluntgomery, Alabama, is under *Lucifer's* control today.

MARTY. Sing it like I mean it, Joe. Take two: "That's Why He's—"

JOE. Martin, that song featured ELEVEN MENTIONS OF THE WORD "WHITEY"!!!

MARTY. Twelve. One for every apostle.

JOE. This is *God's* South, Martin. We Black. And it's a long, long time ago.

MARTY. (*To audience.*) This be the past and shit.

JOE. (*To audience.*) His songs used to fit me like silk jackets. Now they like strait-jackets. And whoever sing 'em gon' need a *bulletproof* jacket!

MARTY. My new songs rise to the beat
Of bus boycotter's feet
Wanna take the struggle to church
And drag gospel into the street

JOE. (*Audience.*) He was an annoyingly pensive child...

MARTY. *Hella-Loo-Yah...*

JOE. (*Audience.*) Spent hours praying in the bathtub...

Beat.

(*Knowing.*) with a handheld mirror.

MARTY. *Ring-My-Bella-Loo-Yah...*

JOE. But my boy Martin Roy would come outta that tub with the wrinkled hands of a sage...and five or six soul-healin' songs!!!

MARTY. *So you could Sella-Loo-Yah...*

JOE. The kinda songs that kept our gospel tent shows packed!

MARTY. *Now take him if he lyin' Jesus!*

JOE. People, my son's seriously lucrative praise-songs kept the moral in God's fable...

MARTY. (*To audience, referring to Joe.*) But not the stud in the stable...

JOE. But they sho-nuff kept the collards on the table!

MARTY. Charlie try a less *churchy* sound if you can. OK cats, Take two—

JOE. (*Audience.*) He wore his momma's high heels when he was little—

MARTY. She loved that.

JOE. Had an unhealthy obsession with Danny Kaye.

MARTY. (*Audience, referring to Joe.*) He beat me for watching Danny Kaye movies...

JOE. Rejected *all* sports!

MARTY. I like tennis. Can we get black to cuttin' your "crossover-comeback" album?

STEW. (*Sung.*) CROSSOVER: BLACK ARTISTS TRYING TO WIN WHITE AUDIENCES WITH A WATERED-DOWN SOUND...

JOE. I *requested* a crossover-comeback album. But what you writin' is a gospel version of the plague.

MARTY. I'm such a pest.

JOE. Which you have feverishly written while under the influence of that invading Yankee army of uppity northern niggas, Black Quaker faggots, Poet-Preachers, meddlin' New York Jews and they (*Spitting disdain.*) *bus boycotts* messin' air-thang up. Well, I boycott thee and thy (*Tears up lyric sheet.*) satanic verses!

“*Heal Me Joe*” starts.

MARTY. (*Audience.*) And it's Backstory Time: The ballad of our financial ruin was penned, not by the “Northern Invaders” and their “satanic” bus boycott, but rather by Papa Joe himself when he—

JOE. (*Audience.*) I cannot be held responsible for my overwhelming charisma... nor the compelling opportunities it affords me.

MARTY. —when he decided to take a “spiritual detour” guided by greed...

“Heal Me Joe”

JOE and ALL.

AS THE ORGAN POUNDED...
AND MY SPIRIT RESOUNDED...
AND THE DRUMS COMPLIED
GOD'S DAUGHTERS CRIED
“LET'CHA GOOD WILL FLOW!!!
LAY YA HANDS ON ME JOE!”

MARTY. Faith Healing: the last refuge of egomaniacal singers.

JOE.

THEM HOLY-HOOTCHIE MAMAS FLIPPED ME
OFTEN THEY GRIPPED ME
AND IF I WOULD'VE BEEN A
CUP OF POMEGRANATE SOUP
THEM BITCHES WOULD'VE SIPPED ME

MARTY. TMI!!! DAD! TMI!!!

JOE.

SON YOU JUST DON'T KNOW!

MARTY. (*As church ladies.*)

I NEED YOU TO HEAL ME JOE!

JOE.

THAT'S WHAT THEM HOLY-HOOTCHIE MAMAS SAID
AND IT WENT STRAIGHT TO MY HEAD

MARTY. I said “egomaniacal singers”...which was redundant.

STEW and BAND.

THE NEGRO PRESS SCREAMED
“JOE IS A FAKE!
JOE IS A SNAKE!”

JOE AIN'T RIGHT"
SO MARTY AND JOE WERE BANISHED
WITH NO GIGS IN SIGHT...

MARTY. We were unemployable. Overnight.

JOE. And Joe hate bein' broke

MARTY. Wait...

Beat.

We're broke?

STEW AND HEIDI. (*Vamp as underscore.*)

JOE MIGHT HAVE TO SELL HIS LAST CADDY-LAC
AND THE LOUIS QUATORZE FURNITURE PLACE
WANTS ALL ITS LOVESEATS BACK.

MARTY. Joe: I've seen our future. *Headline: Papa Joe Roy, Fake Healing Loser—
Sees the Light—Releases Protest Album! And it's number one with a bullet!*
(*Loud.*) Boom!

Joe ducks as if he's heard gunshot.

Comeback Mission Accomplished!

JOE. Any real money in this protest shit?

MARTY. Jesus, Joe, it's music to serve a liberation movement!

JOE. So "no"?

MARTY. Money don't matter tonight. Only this song does. "That's Why He's Jesus"
take two

JOE. Martin: We gotta hawk records to white folks now. Black folks is on to the
next thang. I'm trying to serve God and make us some money. Only now *you*
wanna start callin' our new audience "WHITEY"! In a song!!!!

MARTY. You call them "Whitey" all the time!!!

JOE. With my indoor voice.

MARTY. That's it!!! The music of the future will put a mic on the indoor voice and
then—

JOE. Woman of Satan!!! I will *not* let your artistic vanity be the author of my fall!

MARTY. God alone guides my pen!

JOE. Trying to change this sinful world maketh thee *of* this sinful world!

MARTY. Then take your signature off my creations.

JOE. Never.

MARTY. The Lord God Almighty insists you unhand my publishing!!!

JOE. The only power Negroes will *ever* have is from owning what we create.

MARTY. But you didn't create it, *Mutha-fuka!!!*

Joe grabs a piano bench and approaches Marty, who pulls a knife.

CHARLIE. (*Looking out window.*) Woo! Look at the *gait* on Lady Miss Voreece!

THE TOTAL BENT

text by Stew
music by Heidi Rodewald and Stew

8M, 4n/s

When a British record producer arrives in Bluntgomery, Alabama, to hook Marty Roy, a young black musical prodigy, he launches us back into Marty's tumultuous upbringing. The son of a gospel star and self-proclaimed healer, Marty spent his childhood writing the songs that have made his charismatic father famous. But in a nation on the verge of social upheaval, with the rising heat from the street guiding his pen, Marty finds himself at odds with his spiritually forceful father as he strives to create a masterpiece that will change America—no matter the cost. A funny, fiery, one-of-a-kind show, *THE TOTAL BENT* is about the passions that divide a father and son as they make their music and make their choice between salvation and selling out.

"...blazingly entertaining...fresh and funny... THE TOTAL BENT keeps you hooked through the surging power of its sensational score, which blends elements of the blues, gospel, funk and throbbing guitar-driven rock. Stew's lyrics, too, are a consistent pleasure. ...an ecstatic combination of revival meeting and rock concert." —**The New York Times**

"...daring...a shaggy, idiosyncratic patchwork of Civil Rights-era satire, father-son drama and an allegory about the birth of funk. ...the music is funky, fierce and sticky-sweet..."
—**Time Out New York**

"...a religious experience of the highest caliber...The music...is revelatory. Stew and Rodewald have created a thrilling...score that deftly blends gospel and blues with the style of rock and roll burgeoning during the period in which THE TOTAL BENT is set. Lyrically, the songs are sharp and often bitingly funny. ...thoroughly mesmerizing from start to finish."
—**TheaterMania.com**

"If you're at all familiar with the Stew/Rodewald collaboration, you know it produces wildly pleasing music across pretty much every contemporary genre. THE TOTAL BENT is no exception and, as always, this one is just packed with heart." —**Deadline.com**

Also by Stew and Heidi Rodewald
PASSING STRANGE

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

ISBN 978-0-8222-3640-5

