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.Complex choir boys: Music and finding acceptance

By Janelle Faignant

Arts Correspondent | October 27, 2016

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Provided photo Rehearsals.

Jarvis Green had never heard of playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney before, but when he read his play “Choir Boy,” he couldn’t put it down.

“I knew these characters intimately from first page,” Green said by email recently. “I knew that this is (the show) we had to do.”

A coming of age story centered around two young black men competing for the lead in their prep school’s choir, “Choir Boy” is about being in the thick of a personal struggle to accept and be accepted, while trying to remain true to yourself despite how people perceive you.

“This play is so close to my own life that I didn’t have to spend as much time on research as I oftentimes have to with other plays,” Green said. “I lived these experiences, so my preparation has been a lot of me re-connecting with my own past.”

He’s directing a cast of Broadway veterans and theater artists in the Vermont premiere of “Choir Boy,” opening Thursday, Nov.

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UPDATE: Heavy wet snow caused 7900 outages across #vt. Crews worked overnight & won't stop. Trees loaded w/ snow still

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3, at 7:30 p.m. at Briggs Opera House in White River Junction.

And the story struck a personal note for the cast, as well.

“It’s rare when you see yourself literally reflected in a piece,” Claxton Rabb III, who plays David Heard, said. “I know this story and it’s close to my heart.”

Erick Pinnick, who plays Headmaster Stephen Marrow, called it a “wonderful contemporary piece that tackles issues such as self-worth, bullying, sexuality, honor and respect.”

Green gravitated toward actors with a sense of openness, who were willing to try different things and collaborate to find the characters rather than coming in with fixed ideas.

Will T. Travis plays one of the central characters, Pharus, whom he called “a bold, effeminate young man who speaks his mind and finds himself at odds with another character (Bobby), specifically because of his sexuality.”

“The most viable lesson that I took from (the play),” Travis said, “is individual truth and self acceptance.”

“Bobby is a deeply flawed character,” John Henry Carter V, who plays Bobby, said. “On the surface, he comes across as an entitled student who blows up the second he doesn’t get his way, but he is hiding so much more.”

Carter fell in love with the role saying, “Bobby is a many-layered, highly emotional boy with a limited ability to express all the turmoil inside himself,” a challenge that was fun to take on.

The New York Times said “the sweet harmonies of classic spirituals unite the sometimes fractious voices of the young men in “Choir Boy.” And The Los Angeles Times called it “the best play of the year.”

“There are many complex relationships laced throughout this play,” Carter said, “that allow audiences to see a side of black young men that is not frequently portrayed on stage or film.”

“Choir Boy” runs through November 20 and contains strong language and adult content.

“Choir Boy”

November 3-20

Briggs Opera House, 5 South Main St., White River Junction.

Tickets: \$18 to \$30.

www.artistreevt.org/choir-boy.html.

Box Office: 802-457-3500.

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