

NEW AND VETERAN CAST MEMBERS JOIN
JEREMY POPE TO COMPLETE ENSEMBLE FOR
 WEST COAST PREMIERE OF
TARELL ALVIN McCRANEY'S *CHOIR BOY*
 DIRECTED BY **TRIP CULLMAN**

CAST MEMBERS INCLUDE MEMBERS OF ACCLAIMED
 ALLIANCE THEATRE AND MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB PRODUCTION

LOS ANGELES (August 11, 2014) – The Geffen Playhouse announces the complete cast for the West Coast premiere of *Choir Boy*. This new production – featuring gospel music – will highlight several performers from the Manhattan Theatre Club run. **Nicholas L. Ashe** and **Grantham Coleman** will join the previously announced **Jeremy Pope** whose performance as Pharus Young was called, “magnetic [and] moving,” by *The New York Times*.

Caleb Eberhardt will reprise his role from the Alliance Theatre run that prompted the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* to call the new work, “... an exceptionally beautiful, heart-pummeling piece of theatre.” **Leonard Kelly-Young**, **Donovan Mitchell** and **Michael A. Shepperd** will debut as their respective characters and complete the cast for the Geffen Playhouse production in the Gil Cates Theater.

Trip Cullman will again direct the play written by MacArthur Fellow **Tarell Alvin McCraney**. Previews begin September 16 with an opening night on September 26 and closing on October 26.

At the Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys, a young black man knows what is expected of him. Work hard, fall in line and if you’ve got the voice for it, use it to praise God in the school choir. Within these walls, Pharus Young, with the voice of an angel and a keen mind, should be a star. But in the face of Drew’s time-honored traditions, can music overcome silence? Award-winning playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney navigates expectation, alienation and the overwhelming desire to be heard.

Choir Boy premiered at London’s Royal Court Theatre. *The London Guardian* said *Choir Boy* is, “... an exhilarating multi-layered new play.” Following its American premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club, Marilyn Stasio said in *Variety*, “*Choir Boy*, the mighty coming-of-age play by Tarell Alvin McCraney deserves its kudos. An all-American cast 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. Terrific young actor-singers, some barely out of school themselves, not only make angelic choristers, they also pitch themselves into a hot debate on the meaning and value of gospel music. Could this be another *The History Boys*? Could be.”

Charles Isherwood in *The New York Times* said, “All of the actors portraying the schoolboys have terrific voices, and these sequences are among the most pleasurable in the play.”

McCraney is the author of *Head of Passes* that premiered at Steppenwolf Theatre Company and *The Brother/Sister Plays* trilogy that premiered at the New York Public Theater. *The Brothers Size*, from that trilogy, is currently playing at the Fountain Theatre and has extended through September 14.

Choir Boy comes on the heels of the successful co-production between the Geffen Playhouse and Manhattan Theatre Club for *The Country House* – which saw its world premiere at the Geffen Playhouse and will open on Broadway this October.

In addition to the opening night, the run of *Choir Boy* will feature over a dozen pre-show and post-show Signature Series events. Ranging from the cerebral to the celebratory these include **TGIF at the Geffen**, **Talk Back Tuesdays** (Audience Q+A with artists), **Girls Night Out**, **Lounge Fridays**, and **Wine Down Sundays**. Thanks to the support of Geffen Playhouse partners and sponsors, all elements of Signature Series evenings are complimentary as part of the standard ticket price. Signature Series events include:

- **Talk Back Tuesdays** give theater lovers a chance for a deeper conversation to discuss plot, character, themes or any other questions directly with the artists. Talk Back Tuesdays include pre-show coffee and tea tastings courtesy of Keurig and a post-show Q+A.
- *Girls just wanna have fun*, and **Girls Night Out** events are unique after-parties that happen once during each Gil Cates Theater season production. Guys are welcome too. Each event features partnerships with different lifestyle experts, brands or products that keep patrons on the cusp of what's hot in LA including private shopping events and food tastings: a festive evening of theater followed by an utterly unique party with complimentary signature drinks courtesy of Deep Eddy vodka, appetizers, photo booth and a take away beauty gift.
- Happy hour **Lounge Fridays** turns the Geffen Playhouse into a haven to help fast-paced Angelenos ease into their weekend and unwind at this cultural happy hour. Complimentary sparkling, courtesy of Barefoot Bubbly, joins other enticing refreshments starting at 7:00 pm.
- **Wine Down Sundays** provides the perfect pairing – pre-performance wine sampling poured by winemakers or distributors and classic sounds of Southern California courtesy of 100.3 The Sound spinning vinyl with world class theater. Different vintages are featured for each production allowing patrons to discover new wine and great music before each theatrical experience.
- **TGIF at the Geffen** takes place on Friday of preview week and is the ideal cultural meet up and hot-spot on the west side. Enjoy classic to contemporary tunes from DJ Mike pre-show on the Simms Courtyard patio plus drink specials at the concessions bar.

For Signature Series dates associated with the run of *Choir Boy*, visit www.geffenplayhouse.com/choirboyevents.

CHOIR BOY

Written by Tarell Alvin McCraney

Directed by Trip Cullman

THE CAST

Nicholas L. Ashe as Junior Davis

Grantham Coleman as Anthony Justin "AJ" James

Caleb Eberhardt as David Heard

Leonard Kelly-Young as Mr. Pendleton

Donovan Mitchell as Bobby Marrow

Jeremy Pope as Pharus Jonathan Young

Michael A. Shepperd as Headmaster Marrow

DESIGNERS

Scenic Design: David Zinn

Costume Design: EB Brooks

Lighting Design: Peter Kaczorowski

Sound Design: Fitz Patton

Musical Director & Vocal Arranger: Jason Michael Webb

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

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| Monday | No performance |
| Tuesday – Friday | 8:00 p.m. |
| Saturday | 3:00 pm and 8:00 pm |
| Sunday | 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm |

Previews: Tuesday, September 16 through Thursday, September 25

Opening Night: Friday, September 26

Closing Night: Sunday, October 26

TICKET INFORMATION

Ticket prices are currently \$39-\$79 and are available in-person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, via phone at 310.208.5454 or online at www.geffenplayhouse.com. Fees may apply.

LOCATION

The Gil Cates Theater at the Geffen Playhouse
10886 Le Conte Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024

ABOUT THE CAST

Nicholas L. Ashe is reprising the role of Junior as well as making his Geffen Playhouse debut. Nicholas originated the role in the critically acclaimed production at the Manhattan Theatre Club and joined the cast for a production at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta. His professional credits include the national tour of *The Lion King* (Young Simba). Television: *Songbyrd* (E! Pilot), *The Divide* (AMC Pilot), *Are We There Yet* (TBS).

Grantham Coleman Theater: Off-Broadway: Rattlestick Playwrights Theater's *One Night* (Dir: Clinton Turner Davis); Manhattan Theatre Club's *Choir Boy* (Dir: Trip Cullman); SoHo Rep Theatre's *We Are Proud to Present...* (Dir: Eric Ting); New York Shakespeare Festival's *As You Like It* (Dir: Daniel Sullivan). Regional: Actors Theatre of Louisville's *Romeo and Juliet* (Dir: Tony Speciale). Television: *The Americans* (FX). Training: Juilliard School of Drama.

Caleb Eberhardt is making his Geffen Playhouse debut. A graduate of the SUNY Purchase B.F.A. Acting Conservatory, Caleb was last seen onstage in the Alliance Theatre's production of *Choir Boy*. He has since made his television debut on CBS's *Unforgettable*, and released a third album with his band Quincy Vidal. Previous credits: Guy in *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, Chaplain in *Mother Courage and Her Children* (adapted by Ntozake Shange) (Purchase Rep.); Laertes in *Hamlet* (Theatre of War).

Leonard Kelly-Young last appeared at the Geffen Playhouse in Alan Alda's *Radiance*. Theater credits: New York Off-Broadway at ELT, New York Theater Co., Riverwest, Soho Repertory, Titus in Darko Tresnjak's *Titus Andronicus* at the Old Globe, The Mark Taper Forum, Laguna Playhouse, La Mirada Theater, Ensemble Theater, Rubicon, Missouri Repertory, Goodman Theatre (Jefferson Nomination), Cincinnati Playhouse, Studio Arena Buffalo, Geva Theatre, Huntington Theater, Worcester Company and many Shakespeare festivals across the country. Leonard twice received the Santa Barbara Independent Theatre Award for Performance as Dodge in *Buried Child* and as Doc Lyman in *Bus Stop*. In Los Angeles: *Detective Story* (Ovation Nomination) at the Marilyn Monroe Theatre. Film credits include David Fincher's *Gone Girl* premiering this fall, and many award winning indie film releases, including an adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Kaleidoscope* featured at Comic-Con Independent Film Festival in July. Television: *CSI*, *The Shield*, *Scandal*, *Justified*, *Boston Legal*, *The Defenders*, *Carnival*, *House of Lies*, *Ellen*, *Married with Children*, *Star Trek Enterprise* and many others.

Donovan Mitchell is making his Geffen Playhouse debut with this production of *Choir Boy*. As a graduate of Carnegie Mellon School of Drama, his recent theater credits include: Duke of Burgundy in *King Lear*, Arviragus in *Cymbeline* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival) and Cobb in *A Soldier's Story* (Ebony Repertory Theatre).

Jeremy Pope is a 2014 Drama League Award nominee for his New York debut as Pharus in *Choir Boy* where *The New York Times* heralded his work as "moving and magnetic." He is the founder of Pope Collection Photography. Pope is a graduate of The American Musical and Dramatic Academy.

Michael A. Shepperd is currently the Co-Artistic Director of LA's multiple award winning Celebration Theatre. CT producing, directing, and acting credits include *The Color Purple*, *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Take Me Out*, *Coffee Will Make You Black*, [title of show], and numerous others in his eight years with CT. Broadway/Off-Broadway/National Tour credits include *Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan* (Starkey), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Audrey Two), *Caroline, or Change* (Bus/Dryer), *5 Guys named Moe* (Big Moe). TV: *Wizards of Waverly Place*, *Hot In Cleveland*, *Up All Night*, *Monk*, *Criminal Minds*, *Arrested Development*, etc.

ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

Tarell Alvin McCraney (Playwright)

Tarell is best known for his trilogy *The Brothers Sisters Plays* which includes *In the Red and Brown Water*. That play received its world premiere in the Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Competition at the Alliance Theatre. Other plays include *Wig Out*, *The Breach* (written with Catherine Filloux and Joe Sutton), and *Head of Passes*, which premiered at Steppenwolf Theater, Chicago. Tarell is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama, The Theater School at DePaul University, and the New World School of the Arts in Miami, FL. He is an associate artist at the Royal Shakespeare Company, an ensemble member at the Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago, an artist in residence at the Public Theater, New York, in residence at New Dramatist Playwright Center, New York and a founding member of Teo Castellanos/D Projects in Miami.

Trip Cullman (Director)

Select NYC: Tarrell Alvin McCraney's *Choir Boy* (Manhattan Theatre Club), Julia Jordan and Juliana Nash's *Murder Ballad* (MTC and Union Square Theater), Paul Weitz's *Lonely, I'm Not* (Second Stage), Leslye Headland's *Assistance* (Playwrights Horizons), Adam Bock's *A Small Fire* (Playwrights Horizons, Drama Desk nomination), Adam Rapp's *The Hallway Trilogy: Nursing* (Rattlestick), Headland's *Bachelorette* (Second Stage), Terrence McNally's *Some Men* (Second Stage), Bert V. Royal's *Dog Sees God* (The Century Center), Bock's *The Drunken City* (Playwrights Horizons), Weitz's *Roulette* (EST), Jonathan Tolins's *The Last Sunday In June* (Rattlestick and Century Center), Bock's *Swimming In The Shallows* (Second Stage), Gina Gionfriddo's *U.S. Drag* (stageFARM), and several productions with The Play Company. Select regional: John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* (Old Globe), Richard Greenberg's *The Injured Party* (South Coast Rep), McNally's *Unusual Acts of Devotion* (La Jolla Playhouse), Chris Durang's *Betty's Summer Vacation* (Bay Street Theater), Bess Wohl's *Touched* (Williamstown Theater Festival).

ABOUT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

The Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the Geffen Playhouse continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates, and is currently helmed by Artistic Director Randall Arney, Managing Director Ken Novice, General Manager Behnaz Atae, Chief Development Officer Regina Miller and Co-Chairs of the Board Martha Henderson and Pamela Robinson Hollander. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen Playhouse welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains an extensive education and outreach program, designed to engage young people and the community at large in the arts. For more information, please visit www.geffenplayhouse.com.

MEDIA CONTACT

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