

THE CHOIR

by Errol Bray

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS.

The characters are 7 boys aged from 12-15. **They should be played by adults.**

ANDREW (15) - the leader; idolised by the others **MICHAEL** (14) - silent and damaged

PAUL (14) - violent and scared

GARRY (13) - the romantic

DAVID (13) - the singer

PETER (12) - the baby

COLIN (12) - the brain

SETTING.

A dormitory for 7 boys in a State Orphanage. Need not be "realistic". **MICHAEL's** desk must be clearly visible to all the audience as his silent reactions are vital to the drama.

Suggested furniture:- 3 double-decker bunks and one single bed; a desk or table with desk-lamp; 2 chairs; set of hooks for hanging robes. Other useful furniture:- another small table with a chair; a trunk at the foot of the single bed (for storing clothes etc). The 2010 production in Melbourne had no furniture and only pyjamas as costumes.

SYNOPSIS.

The orphanage boys' choir has won the interstate competition 3 years in a row. **MISS LAWSON** (never seen) wants to win it again. She has the boy sopranos castrated so that their voices will remain high, pure and beautiful. The choir boys get an easy life with 7 to a dormitory and they also are passionate in wanting to win. **ANDREW** is the Head Boy in the dormitory of this story. The others idolise him except for **MICHAEL** who will not speak and sits at his desk cutting out heads from photos in magazines. Underneath the story lies an uneasy and distorted sexuality with **ANDREW** as love-god.

During a fight/game/tease **MICHAEL** reveals that the castration is a mistake because they were done too late. Their voices are still changing. He thinks everyone must know this but the other Boys don't. They are extremely disturbed by the revelation. They try to organise an escape. They try to tell the rest of the choir who won't believe them at first and fighting breaks out amongst the different choir rooms. Others try to set the building on fire. In a fight, **DAVID** (the singer) is injured in the throat. He commits suicide with the help of his best friend, **COLIN**.

ANDREW tries to bring about calm. But he no longer holds sway over his group. They castrate him so that everyone in their room will be equal.

SCENE 1.

FOUR BOYS in choir robes rush into the room, laughing and jostling each other. MICHAEL follows slowly and immediately sits at his desk. He takes a magazine and cuts out faces from the pictures with a stanley-knife. He is very intense in this activity. He remains in his choir robe.

Meanwhile - the other FOUR take off their choir gear and hang it up neatly as they talk. They are in long pants.

PAUL - She really wants to win again.

DAVID - We will too. We work hard.

GARRY - Three rehearsals today.

DAVID - And we're only kids.

PAUL - We suffer for it all right.

DAVID - The choir does pretty well. Seven to a room.

GARRY - The others have about 40.

COLIN - This orphanage choir has won the national competition for the last three years. No single organisation has ever done that before.

GARRY - Turn him off.

COLIN - It's true. Miss Lawson told me. That's why she's so determined that we should win. It's tradition.

DAVID - You have to admit, Garry, it's pretty good for orphans.

PAUL - What's that got to do with it?

DAVID - Once you're an orphan people don't think you can do anything. They just lock you away and forget you.

GARRY - We have been forgotten.

PAUL - This room's too high up. I want to be down with the others.

DAVID - Why? We can make all the noise we like up here. We can sing and yell out.

GARRY - You can't do that downstairs.

COLIN - This is luxury. The choir gets special treatment.

PAUL - I don't want special treatment. I don't trust Miss Lawson.

DAVID - Well, you won't get out of the choir. Miss Lawson won't let you.

GARRY - You've got a good voice.

PAUL - I'll start singing flat.

COLIN - That Gordon from room three has got a terrific voice. He stands next to me.

DAVID - He's been here since he was seven. I could sing like that with his training.

GARRY - Haven't they let Peter out of bed yet?

PAUL - You know what Nurse is like. She keeps everyone a couple of days "in case of complications".

COLIN - He should come up tonight.

DAVID - I wish we got supper like Andrew does.

PAUL - It's just a cup of cocoa and a biscuit.

DAVID - How do you know?

PAUL - One of the other seniors told me.

GARRY - Andrew's the best senior. We're lucky to have him in our room.

COLIN - We'd better get dressed for bed before Andrew comes.

COLIN grabs his pyjamas and hurries into the Bathroom, slamming the door.

DAVID - What's the rush?

PAUL - He farted. He's doing it again. He farted.

GARRY - You turd, Colin!

COLIN - **(From bathroom)** I can't help it.

PAUL - You shouldn't eat so fast.

OTHERS are settling onto their bunks.

GARRY - Andrew's going to leave soon - when he's sixteen.

MICHAEL looks up from his desk and pauses in his cutting but soon returns to it.

DAVID - He won't leave.

GARRY - He has to. It's a rule.

PAUL - He'll want to. He'll be sick of us by then.

GARRY - It's only a few months.

PAUL - We'll get another senior.

GARRY - It won't be as good.

PAUL - It might be better.

GARRY - You've never liked him, have you?

PAUL - Of course I do. But he's not god.

DAVID - We're going to win that competition. We're the best choir out. We might be the best choir in the world.

COLIN enters during this comment. He is now in his pyjamas.

COLIN - No, David. There's some very famous choirs. There's --

PAUL - Shut up, fart face. We don't want any of your lists of 400 things no-one else knows.

COLIN - It's not my fault I fart. It's Andrew's fault.

GARRY - You don't see us doing it all the time, do you?

DAVID - I wonder why no-one ever adopted us?

PAUL - We're too old. People want cute little babies.

GARRY - I know why no-one ever adopted Michael. Look at him. Are you cutting out some good faces tonight, Michael?

MICHAEL looks at him but says nothing.

DAVID - Why does he only cut out the faces? He doesn't even cut out the hair.

COLIN - It's probably some sort of psychiatric disturbance. I read this book that said that quiet people are often ---

PAUL - You're okay then if it's only quiet people who go crazy. You're noisy both ends.

COLIN - Very funny.

GARRY - It was like this at school. You were kept in rooms, even if it was a nice day, and you were told what to do all the time, and every time you wanted to do something different you had to ask permission.

PAUL - At least you didn't have to sleep there.

DAVID - Kids have to be told what to do.

GARRY - Why?

DAVID - Because we're kids.

PAUL - **(To GARRY)** You like it when Andrew tells you what to do.

GARRY - That's all right. He's Andrew.

PETER, 12 and small, enters quietly in pyjamas and dressing gown. He stands in the doorway, unnoticed.

PAUL - Anything he did you'd say was all right.

GARRY - Why do you keep making cracks about Andrew?

DAVID - Andrew's got a beautiful voice.

MICHAEL sees PETER and stares at him.

PAUL - That's not the beautiful part Garry likes.

GARRY - You watch him get undressed every night.

PAUL - Me?!

DAVID - I do. He's got / beautiful ---

MICHAEL - **(Standing abruptly at /)** Peter!

The OTHERS react and look at PETER but hesitate to move.

PAUL - Are you okay, Peter?

DAVID and COLIN go to PETER and comfort him, awkwardly. PAUL

goes but hangs back a little.

DAVID - It's not so bad, is it?

COLIN - She let you out of bed quickly.

PETER - I didn't bleed at all, she said.

GARRY - You look a bit pale.

DAVID - *(Helping PETER)* Come and sit down.

They help him to the edge of the single bed.

COLIN - I was in bed for three days.

PAUL - You're a baby.

MICHAEL goes back to cutting out.

DAVID - It's not all that bad.

PETER - It is. *(Lies on the bed crying)*

GARRY - Cheer up. *(Pats PETER's back and strokes his hair)*
Don't cry.

ANDREW enters, unnoticed. He is almost 16 and very handsome. He is in full choir robes. He watches for a few moments.

DAVID - You'll get used to it, Peter.

PAUL - Let him fucking cry if he wants to.

ANDREW - Paul!

They all look around at ANDREW. GARRY continues to stroke PETER.

ANDREW - Choirboys don't swear, do they, Paul?

PAUL - *(Defiant)* Sometimes we do.

ANDREW - No, Paul. Choirboys in my dorm never swear. Okay?

PAUL - *(Still defiant)* Okay.

ANDREW - Better write that in your book a hundred times so you don't forget.

PAUL - A hundred? A bloody hundred?