

Boys Choir of Harlem: Black Male Magic

by Nyewusi Askari

Get ready Portland. There is some "for real" black magic coming your way at 7 p.m., Sunday, March 20 in the auditorium of Benson High School, 546 N.E. 12th Avenue.

From Bach's St. Thomas' Church to Harlem's Apollo Theater by way of a southern plantation, the magic will be spun by the world-renown "Boys Choir of Harlem," who will make a rare appearance in Portland this coming Sunday.

Under the direction of Dr. Walter J. Turnbull, the Choir has delighted audiences world-wide with a repertoire ranging from classical music to popular songs, gospel, jazz and spirituals, highlighted by spirited choreography.

The Boys Choir of Harlem provides inner-city young people with a unique opportunity to realize their creative potential. The Choir tours frequently throughout the United States and Europe, including concerts at Orchestra Hall in Chicago; Avery Fisher Hall, Alice Tully Hall and Carnegie Hall in New York; and Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis. The Choir appears regularly on all three major television networks and CNN, and was the subject of an Emmy award-winning documentary, "From Harlem to Har-

lem: the Story of a Choir Boy," in 1980.

An ensemble of 35, the Choir features tenor and bass voices as well as treble, allowing for great musical versatility.

Founded in 1968 as a small group of choir members at Epheusus Church in central Harlem, it was incorporated as The Boys Choir of Harlem in 1975. In the ensuing decade, it has grown from a small church choir to a major performing arts institution of international reputation.

Since its inception, The Boys Choir of Harlem has stressed not only the teaching of music, but also preparing its members for productive lives. It has four basic objectives: (1) to educate and broaden the child's aesthetic perception; (2) to provide boys and girls between the ages of 9 and 17 with the opportunity to realize their creative potential through the performance of various kinds of music; (3) to extend successes in music to better and more productive lifestyles; and (4) to provide — in addition to music — counseling, tutoring and recreation activities which assist in the total development of the child.

Today, the Choir consists of more than 125 young people. They are organized into three

choirs — performing, training and the girls choir.

All choir members come from New York City — the vast majority of them from the heart of Harlem. Although it is a thriving community that is making much progress, it is far from the ideal place for a boy or girl to grow up. Drugs and crime abound. Eighty-five percent of the school-age students read below their grade level. Less than half will graduate from high school. Only a handful will go on to college.

Viewed against that backdrop, the success of the alumni of The Boys Choir of Harlem is nothing short of spectacular. Many have gone on to pursue degrees and careers in music at places like the Eastman School of Music in Rochester and the Manhattan School of Music. But others have chosen quite different paths. Today's alumni include not only musicians and teachers of music, but also Wall Street brokers, accountants, ministers and hotel managers.

The Boys Choir takes its mission very seriously. Tutoring in English and mathematics is provided to choir members six days a week. Choir members must maintain a "B" average in school. Mandatory attendance at choir rehearsals from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. every weekday and all day on Saturdays is strictly enforced. During the summer, choir members attend day camp in New York and live-away camp in the Connecticut countryside. And, a staff of full-time counselors provide year-round career, family and adolescent counseling.

Walter Turnbull, co-founder of the Choir, is a native of Greenville, Mississippi. After receiving a Master's degree and a Ph.D. degree from the Manhattan School of Music, he taught in East Harlem for several years. "I noticed that being in a music course gave the kids a direction. It was very rewarding, but I found that the system was not helping the needs of the people it was supposed to serve. What I found

was a lot of talented kids and no one to help them. I decided to do something," he recalled. Mr. Turnbull is at his peak performance in front of his choir. He stresses perfection. He strives for individual and group excellence. And he insists on one-hundred-and-ten percent devotion and dedication from each choir member.

Praise for the Choir has come from many areas of the country. "This Choir, expertly guided by director Walter J. Turnbull, is one of the finest of its kind, splendidly disciplined in tone quality, precision, balance and intonation," (New York Daily News). "The Boys Choir of Harlem brought Richmond an unforgettable Easter gift Saturday night... One simply wanted to stand up and cheer," (The Richmond News Leader). "The boys put on a truly great show, one of the season's best... Irresistible, unforgettable, the Boys Choir of Harlem created the kind of music any country in the world could be proud of." (Dayton Beach News).

The Choir's presence in Portland is sponsored by Portland Public Schools and is free to all children and students living in the Portland Metropolitan areas. Portland Public Schools Superintendent, Matthew Prophet, said getting The Boys Choir to appear in Portland was primarily the efforts of Dr. Ernie Herzog and Ken Berry. "We wanted to show all students in our system what can be achieved through hard work, discipline and dedication, especially on the part of African-American students. We also wanted an event that would bring together families, parents, relatives, churches, teachers, educators and other members from the various communities," Mr. Prophet said. For adults aged 18 and older, a \$2 admission fee will be charged.

So, Portland, buckle up your spiritual and musical seatbelts. This will be one unforgettable magical ride! See you at the concert...

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LOTTERY

Community Mental Health Rehabilitation

Imagine you have just discovered you have diabetes. This has landed you in the hospital, and they just let you out on your own devices. All you know is that you're sick. But, where do you get help? What are the do's and don't's of surviving with a disease from which you could easily end up dead as a result?

This predicament confronts many of the mentally ill in far too many instances. In response to this existing condition, the N/NE Community Mental Health Center has formulated an approach which directly deals with helping to better equip those in-need individuals to handle living experiences and responsibility in the community.

The primary goal is to help the mentally ill client to learn to cope with their disability, with an emphasis on accepting the disability and learning to live with it, and achieve the highest quality of life possible within the limitations of their disability.

In retrospect, the relatively recent trend to return persons with mental conditions to the community may be commendable. However, the reality of the situation is such that providing support and teaching the patient how to survive is far more critical. The N/NE Community Mental Health Center provides an array of services geared specifically to help those in need cope and become viable citizens.

The semi-independent living

program is an in-clinic, day treatment project that focuses on recreational and leisure activities which develop coping skills. This is done during structured activities in a non-threatening environment. Activities may take the form of outings, baking group, arts and crafts instruction group therapy, relaxation training and teaching independent living skills. The objective of these activities is to build self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Another component to providing comprehensive services in this area is the N.E. Connection which functions as a satellite program in the community. The N.E. Connection is a socialization center which provides clients the opportunity to meet people and feel connected to others. Social, recreational and self-help classes are available to the clients.

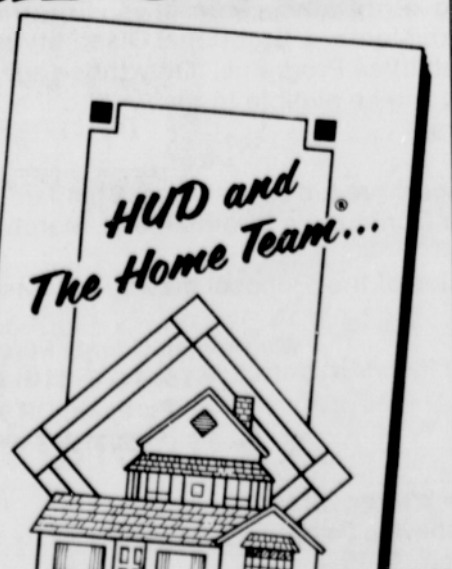
The N/NE Community Mental Health Center is deeply committed to developing the rehabilitation component of its services for the care of the population that it serves. The semi-independent living program and the N.E. Connection reflect that commitment, and demonstrate the earnestness of their mission in the community.

Readers of the Community Mental Health column are invited to write to us: N/NE Community Mental Health Center, Attn: James Edmondson, 310 N.E. Oregon, Portland Oregon.

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