

VIRGINIA STAGE COMPANY AUDITIONS

THE PARCHMAN HOUR

Songs and Stories of the '61 Freedom Riders

AUDITION DATE

JUNE 9:30AM-1PM on the Wells Theatre Stage. By Appointment Only. Email your headshot and resume to audition@vastage.org along with your requested audition time. Audition Requirements listed below.

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Performances Run: October 25 - November 12, 2017
 Wednesdays through Sundays, including Wednesday 10am matinee
 Wells Theatre

Rehearsals Run: September 26 - October 24, 2017

ABOUT THE SHOW

In the spring and summer of 1961, a group of mostly young people — black and white — came together from across the United States — leaving families, college campuses, and jobs — to board buses headed for the Deep South. In May, the original 13 riders boarded a bus in Washington, D.C., bound for New Orleans via Mississippi and Alabama. They barely made it out of Alabama alive. Over the course of the next three months, approximately 300 other riders took up the mantle and followed the path of those first brave few. Their action was intended to call attention to the 1955 ruling of the Interstate Commerce Commission that segregation in interstate travel vehicles and facilities was illegal. That ruling had never been honored in the Southern states. The riders' plan was straightforward: integrated teams would embark on interstate trips and simply ignore the signs designed to segregate them by race. These acts of nonviolent direct action landed many of the riders in jail. Some were beaten and hospitalized. Some were sent to the infamous Parchman Farm Prison in Mississippi.

Based on interviews, newspaper accounts, documentary imagery and other primary sources and presented in the style of the variety shows of the 1950s and '60s, *The Parchman Hour* explores three of the tensest months of 1961.

Directed by playwright Mike Wiley.

For more information on the play, check out:

http://www.guthrietheater.org/plays_events/plays/_parchman_hour

For more information on the playwright, check out: <http://mikewileyproductions.com/about-us/>

Songs from the Show:

Eyes on the Prize : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZWdDI_fkns

Woke Up This Morning : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TszixdKfOsE>

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around :

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sieDJNW66sY&index=14&list=PLmXVci24N0MXtWp9oyhGb-s_5kaoRmtsR

Death Came Knockin' : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHliWQLhfp4>

AUDITION DETAILS

VIRGINIA STAGE COMPANY is seeking a dynamic, nimble, game group of actors comfortable shifting in and out of multiple characters and playing styles. Songs include freedom songs from the period and gospel. Strong singers are needed, but, with the exception of Pearl, exactly who is a strong singer is flexible.

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REQUIREMENTS: Prepare 16-32 bars of your favorite R&B or gospel song, and at least one of the following sides.

Character Listing:

- Actor 1** - Forsyth / Stephen Green / G. Patterson / Policeman – 20s, C Male
- Actor 2** - Janie Forsyth / Mimi Real / R. Kennedy – 20s, C Female
- Actor 3** - Mama Forsyth / J.T. Mulholland / Bill Svanoe / Bull Connor – 20s, C Female
- Actor 4** - Elwood / H. Thomas / J. Zwerge / Simeon Booker – 20s, C Male
- Actor 5** - Pearl / L. Collins / Jimmy McDonald / Jessie Harris – 30s, AA Female – strong gospel singer
- Actor 6** - John Lewis – 20s, AA Male
- Actor 7** - James Farmer – 40s, AA Male
- Actor 8** - Stokely Charmichael – 20s, AA Male
- Actor 9** - Carol Silver / Pauline Knight / James Farmer's Mother – 20s, AA Female
- Actor 10** - Deputy Tyson – 50s, C Male
- Actor 11** - Pee Wee / MLK Jr. – 30s, AA Male
- Actor 12** - Freddie Leonard / James Farmer Sr. – 20s, AA Male
- Actors 13-15** - Prison guards / mob members – 20s-50s, C Male

C: Caucasian, AA: African American

2 White Males (One 30's or 40's and the other 20's.)

White Female (early 20's buy able to play younger)

Elwood and Forsyth (Papa) are PBR in a can drinkin', stock car lovin', good ole' boys. But they are not rednecks. They are real people and should not be cliché.

Janie is a 12year old tomboy.

JANIE

Down by the river, down by the sea,

Johnny broke a bottle and blamed it on me.

I told ma, ma told pa,

Johnny got a whuppin' so ha ha ha.

How many whuppins did Johnny get? 1, 2, 3, (continues to count)

MAMA

(From off Stage)

Janie? You got ten more minutes then it's time to come in and wash up for supper.

(Janie continues to count and skip rope. She doesn't acknowledge her Mama.)

MAMA

(Still off stage)

You hear me girl? Janie Forsyth? I said ten minutes!

(Janie's father enters carrying a large bag of seed.
He exits and returns empty handed with a customer.
He's adding in his head)

ELWOOD

I told her if she didn't like the smell, she shouldn't 'a married a hog farmer. It's part and parcel, know what I mean? Like the song says, "Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, hogs gotta-

PAPA

Alrighty then, that's ten bags of feed, a pallet of grain-

MAMA

Janie do you hear me calling you?!

ELWOOD

Again, I apologize for come'n out on a Sunday Forsythe, but I can't afford no good help. I can't pay a white man to do what a nigra'll do for half the price.

MAMA

Janie do you hear me calling you?!

PAPA

She heard ya woman! Hell we all heard ya. They heard ya down in Montgomery. You heard her didn't ya Janie?

JANIE

(Losing count and getting frustrated)

Shoot. I heard ya mama. Dang it.

PAPA

You heard her didn't ya Elwood?

ELWOOD

I-I, heard ya Mrs. Forsyth.

PAPA

That was rhetorical El. Now I'm gone' pay for that later. She don't abide public pickin. Thirty-five even. Come on back inside and I'll ring it all up.

ELWOOD

(calling off stage)

Mighty fine singin' ya done in church this morning Mrs. Forsyth. (to Janie) Bout time for you to get up in that choir stand isn't it Janie? (no response from Janie) She don't talk much do she?

PAPA

Not as much as you Elwood.

ELWOOD

Hey now, I can't help it I got the gift a' gab. Say, what'cha think of that spaceship?

PAPA

The Mercury? Just us one upp'in' the Reds is all. (to Janie) Janie go on in the house now and take this water pale with ya. (sets a full pale of water beside her and exits)

ELWOOD

(Following him)

I don't know, I think it'd be mighty wild to meet some of them little green men.

JANIE

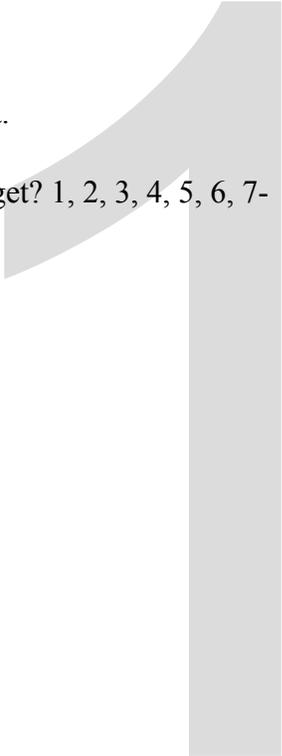
Down by the river, down by the sea,

Johnny broke a bottle and blamed it on me.

I told ma, ma told pa,

Johnny got a whuppin' so ha ha ha.

How many whuppins did Johnny get? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7-



2 African American Males (Early 20's)

John Lewis is an MLK preacher type and Carmichael is a smart ass, funny, early advocate of Black Power type.

JOHN LEWIS

In 1955 I heard Martin King speak on the radio. I was only thirteen or fourteen myself, but I was riveted.

C. BURKS-BROOKS

John Lewis. Twenty-One. Student.

J. LEWIS

He had managed to persuade fifty thousand Montgomery negroes to boycott with nothing but simple eloquence and plain words. But it wasn't just talk. It was action. Action of a different kind. Fighting of a different kind. These folk weren't retaliating with their fist. They were speaking with their feet. I didn't know a hair about non-violence or passive resistance. I just knew that violence sickened me. There was something about this kind of protest that awakened something in me.

S. CARMICHAEL

Not me jack. I can't swing with that spiritual evangelism. I just don't see my responsibility to be the moral and spiritual redemption of some lynch mob or racist thug. I'd settle for changing his behavior, period. Morally, legally, even my fists. I'll leave saintliness to the more spiritually evolved.

J. LEWIS

Then you're not embracing true pacifism.

S. CARMICHAEL

And I don't intend to Lewis.

J. LEWIS

But this movement is a pacifist movement.

S. CARMICHAEL

You and I may keep our fists lowered today Lewis but the colored citizens of Mississippi of these United States may raise them tomorrow. This moment is a pacifist moment in a larger movement.

J. LEWIS

Moment? Mahatma Gandhi, successfully used nonviolent direct action to liberate an entire subcontinent from the imperialist grasp of the British Empire. That's no moment. That is a movement.

African American Male (Early to mid 20's)
White Male (30's or 40's)

In this scene the African American Male is portraying the white PATRON in a re-enactment of an incident in Charlotte. BILLY the white male is the barber and owner of the shop. Both men are southern and passionate about Duke and Carolina basketball. The Patron is a Carolina fan and Billy is a Duke fan. The idea of integration is so foreign to the men that the Freedom Rider's entrance almost goes unnoticed. Almost like seeing a unicorn..you don't notice it till its horn is poking you.

PATRON

That's hogwash Billy and you know it! I was in the building. It was a full on lynchin'.

BILLY

Half the damn team comes through here on their way home. Hell the morning after, Heyman was squatting in the same chair your sitting in now, telling me the whole dang story. He had a black eye and a busted lip on account of that punk.

PATRON

Punk?! Larry Brown's only 5'9" on a good day. Heyman, who is 6' friggen 5" mauled him in the middle of a layup, then pulled the Duke bench for help. Who's the punk Billy?

(A black man enters and sits in the shoe shine chair)

BILLY

Heyman had already scored thirty-some odd points for Duke. Why in God's name would he need to foul Brown that hard?

PATRON

To keep the lead.

BILLY

Bubkiss- (to Joe) You need somethin' boy?

H. THOMAS

Shave 'n a haircut, sir?

PATRON

Heyman might be the best player in the conference I'll grant you but he's a hot head and the main reason your boys don't make it to the post season.

BILLY

Not in here boy. Get on. (back to his conversation) Your Heels can't win a tournament if the conference don't let 'em play in 'em. (to Hank) You hear me son? We don't cut nigra hair in here. (again back to his conversation) All them wins, even in '57 was on account of McGuire cheatin.

PATRON

That's load of bullsh-

BILLY

Hold on here- (heading toward the door) I don't know what part of the world you hailin' from son, but Charlotte ain't the place to be testing. (out the door) That's for damn sure- Sam!?



African American Male (Early to mid 20's)

Freddy Leonard is African American, young, and passionate. He's not quite sure about Non-violence as a movement, but is willing to go along with it in the moment of the Freedom Rides. He and Carmichael are cell mates and somewhat of a comedy duo at times.

So they came in to take my mattress. They drug me out into the cell block, But I still had it, I wouldn't turn it loose-

S. CARMICHAEL

Freddy Leonard. Eighteen. Student.

F. LEONARD

And one of the inmates, I mean the *inmates*, you know? Peewee they called him; uh—they said, “Peewee, get him”. Peewee came down on my head man, wamp, wamp (beat) wamp, wamp. But he was crying. Peewee was crying. And I still had my mattress. That's when I— do you remember when your parents used to whup you and say, "It's going to hurt me more than it hurt you." It hurt Peewee more than it hurt me. I still wouldn't turn my mattress loose, so they had these things they put on our wrists, and they started tightening them, they were like handcuffs, and they started twisting and tightening them up— my bones started to crack, crack, cracking and my hands stood out. Turned my mattress loose.

S. CARMICHAEL

It was humiliating. I knew Pee Wee didn't have no choice, but did he have to appear so willing a tool? Afterward to my astonishment Freddy defended him-

F. LEONARD

It wont so bad.

S. CARMICHAEL

What you talking about? He like to take yo head off!

F. LEONARD

Yeah, he coulda' hurt me real bad, man. But he was pulling up. No joke. I could feel it man. Every blow he came down me, Pee Wee was crying and pullin up. No doubt about it, this is Parchman Farm.

2 African American females (20's)

This is a comedy sketch the likes of *Amos and Andy* or *Jack Benny and Rochester*.

M. REAL

What you wanna do is stop talkin' bout goin' to jail. Uplift yo'self, elevate, be somebody. Follow in the footsteps a' great men.

L. COLLINS

Now what the use of me bein' somebody and elevatin.? What good it's goin' do me, I wanna go somewhere I can eat.

M. REAL

Well, that's all right. If you elevate, then you can eat.

L. COLLINS

I never will forget the words of my grandmother use to tell me when I was a little boy. She use to hold me on her lap and look into my big blue eyes. She'd push my goldilocks back from my forehead and said, "Son, my darlin son, where there's a will dere's a way."

M. REAL

She was right!

L. COLLINS

I got a will to eat, but I cain' find the way.

M. REAL

Keep on lookin' you'll find it.

L. COLLINS

But now since you said dat, ah, elevation- you know, dat's sumpthin' good. We ought to do that. Get outta the gutter and step on the sidewalk.

M. REAL

Now you talkin'.

L. COLLINS

Follow in the footsteps of great men-

M. REAL

Yeah!

L. COLLINS

Men like Booker T. Washington.

M. REAL

That's a great man.

L. COLLINS

That's a man who's name is known everywhere.

M. REAL

Yeah!

L. COLLINS

The chillun knows him, his picture is in de books and papers. Why? Because he was a man that done sumthin'.

M. REAL

Yeah! (beat) And what did he do?

L. COLLINS

I don't know. But whatever it was, he done it.

M. REAL

Yeah.

L. COLLINS

And look at that other great man.

M. REAL

Who was that?

L. COLLINS

Dat great soldier-

M. REAL

Who?

L. COLLINS

Frederick Douglass- put his gun on his shoulder, walked out onto de battlefield, and said, "Gimme liberty or shoot me."

M. REAL

Uh-huh.

And dey shot him. L. COLLINS

What? M. REAL

But there's a man- L. COLLINS

Who? M. REAL

Abraham Lincoln. L. COLLINS

Honest Abe?! M. REAL

Dat's da one! L. COLLINS

Chopped Down his daddy's cherry tree- M. REAL

Sho nuff did. L. COLLINS

Wont he a white supremecist? M. REAL

Ain't everybody perfect! L. COLLINS

White Male (20's)
This is the Grand Dragon of the KKK speaking to a crowd of hundreds at a rally. However the speech should be understated, dark, and evil. It should come from the dark place within all humans, not a cartoon of the “rabid Franken-Racist.”

KLANSMAN

By God, if you're gone' do this thing do it right. The Freedom Riders will be coming through Sunday morning, Mother's day. Bring you're ball bats and clubs- You'll have fifteen minutes. You can wail on'em, whup'em beat 'em, bomb 'em- Hell, maim 'em like the devil got a hold of 'em-and if they make it through Anniston, they damn sure wont make it through Birmingham. Bull's done sent word. You can even kill 'em- mark my words, don't nobody give a damn. There will be absolutely no arrests.

African American Female (20's)

White Female (20's)

African American Male (20's)

This is a re-enactment of a phone conversation between Robert Kennedy (African American Female) his secretary (White Female) and Simeon Booker (African American Male) The Robert Kennedy imitation should be a send up of every bad Kennedy imitation.

Booker is played straight and the secretary is an old deep voiced, "yenta" type.

Who is it again?

R. KENNEDY

Simeon Booker, sir.

SECRETARY

Who?

R. KENNEDY

Simeon Booker, a reporter with the negro press.

SECRETARY

What? They have their own newspapers. Never mind, put him through.

R. KENNEDY

Attorney General Kennedy.

R. KENNEDY

Mr. Attorney General, this is Simeon Booker.

SIMEON BOOKER

I know who you are Simeon, I've been reading your stuff in err ah...

R. KENNEDY

(whispers)
Jet and Ebony.

SECRETARY

Jet and err, ah Ebony for a while now. Good stuff, very...Negro. What do you need?

R. KENNEDY

S. BOOKER

I just wanted to remind you that the Freedom Rides start today.

R. KENNEDY

Wonderful- the what?

S. BOOKER

The CORE Freedom Rides sir?

R. KENNEDY

CORE?

S. BOOKER

The Congress of Racial Equality-

R. KENNEDY

Yes, yes, of course- CORE.

S. BOOKER

They'll be leaving Washington today sir. Traveling south. They say if there are arrests, they will accept arrest without bail and if there is violence-

R. KENNEDY

Uh Huh. Swell. Look Booker, send me a postcard, Alright?

S. BOOKER

(bewildered)

Send you a what!?

R. KENNEDY

I wish I could do more, hell, I wish I could go with you. But my joy riding days are done. Safe travels to ya.

African American Female (40's)
Jessie Harris is a homeboy from around the way.
Tough as nails. A real badass.

J. HARRIS

James Bevel came to the place where we hung out at- it was like a pool hall. He said, "Hey we got this bus coming in. People are gonna be protesting at the Trailways bus station and they need local support. That's where my education started.

POLICEMAN 1

Jessie Harris. Eight-Teen. Caddy at a Negro golf course.

J. HARRIS

I didn't understand nonviolence. I didn't talk about nothin'. I was just listenin' (laughs) I was loving it and learning it. My favorite was Bernard LaFayette, because he was more like the 'hood type, in his conversation. What you call the street talk. We could relate to him because he was funny and he was intellectual. Lawson and Farmer, they were talking like they giving a lecture at Harvard University or something. Lafayette, he could relate that back to where I came from, to those of us from the Jackson area.

African American Male (Any Age)

Pee Wee is large and intimidating but funny and down home. He should be able to sing and play the violin, harmonica, or guitar.

Pee Wee

You wanna know why we sang when it's all so bad? You hafta, ya- ya hafta forget. Ya forget and see an the time just pass on away. But if ya just git cha mind devoted on one something, the crime ya done or didn't do, the gal ya left behind, ya mama- whatever.. it look like it be hard for ya to make it, see. Day be long it look like. So to git his mind, keep his mind from being devoted on this one terrible thing, well he just practice take'n up singin'. You asked me if ya hafta have a purdy voice to lead the singin in the work? Naw Boss. To my understanding it take the man with the most experience. You see if you brang a brand new man in here, I mean a fella that had a voice where he could sing just like Peter could preach and he didn't know what to sing about, well then he wouldn't be no good. Where here's a fella where maybe he ain't got no voice for singin' but he been cooperatin with the people for so long and been on the job so long till he know just exactly how the singin should go. An if he can just mostly talk it he'd be doin ahiite. Why you understand how the work would go good don't 'cha boss? It don't make'm difference bout his voice. But you got to have experience.

Bull Connor (White Female) is a Jessie Helms type. Full of himself and white supremacy. This is one of his “tender” moments. Cathy Burks (White Female) is a tough, speaks -her-mind kind of black woman.

White Female (20’s-30’s)

White Female (20’s-30’s)

BULL

I don’t consider ya’ll evil. You just kids. You’re misguided, foolish, ignorant of the ways of the world, but you ain’t evil. You need hobbies like fishing or bowling or knitting. Any of you gals knit?

(silence)

BULL

I fancy bowlin’ myself.

C. BURKS

Mr. Connor can I ask you a question?

L. COLLINS

Catherine?!

BULL

Sure, what’s your name girl?

C. BURKS

Catherine Burks.

BULL

Well, Cathy what do ya wanna know?

C. BURKS

Don’t you understand segregation contradicts true freedom?

BULL

I understand that ya'll have been duped is all. Duped by communist enter-lopers who do not truly understand what it means to be free. You're agitators, is what you are- a mixed race plague come to infect our way of life. If it costs some freedom to belay that disease, then that's the price we gone' hafta pay.

C. BURKS

But the "we" you continue to extract freedoms from, is the negro race. The ~~black and brown~~ colored people of America. I don't know if you have children Mr. Connor, but I would be willing to bet you'd want them to have every God given freedom owed them.

BULL

Even the dumbest farmer in the world knows that if he has white chickens and black chickens, that the black chickens do better if they're kept in one yard to themselves. If you stay in ya place, be with your people, and worship the good Lord, then Cathy, you just as free as any white gal. This is where we part.

L. COLLINS

But this is in the middle of nowhere.

BULL

Ya'll can catch a train from here, or maybe a bus.

J. LEWIS

(To audience)

Bull Connor and his deputies had indeed dropped us off in the middle of nowhere across the boarder of Tennessee. Even had the nerve to send up that snide parting shot, but thankfully we weren't lynched. We collected ourselves and stumbled down the dark country roads of Alabama.

C. BURKS-BROOKS

That Bull Connor done plucked my last nerve! Come on ya'll, we goin' back Birmingham.