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Tallahassee Boys' Choir in Atlanta to perform for Tyler Perry and guests

By Jhenelle Johnson
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They thought someone was playing a joke when they got the call. But now the ink has dried and they're on fire with excitement.

It took two weeks to convince Earle Lee Jr., director of the Boys' Choir of Tallahassee, that he and his choir would be singing at the opening of Tyler Perry's new motion-picture studio in Atlanta. Lee said the boys, too, had a hard time believing Perry wanted them.

"They've had so many disappointments in life, so much rejection, they didn't believe," he explained. "They were waiting around, holding their feelings back."

Lee and 70 members of the choir arrived in Atlanta on Thursday afternoon. They were expected to continue to practice today in preparation for Saturday night's appearance at the opening of Perry's studio, near the Greenbriar Mall in southwest Atlanta.

"We've been having a great time," Lee said Thursday night. "We got up here about 4:30 p.m. and they had us come straight to the studios. Tyler Perry was blown away. (The studio) is like Hollywood in Atlanta."

Time magazine recently added TV and movie producer Perry to its 2008 list of "The World's Most Influential People." Perry also just completed "The Family That Preys," which he directed and starred in.

Lee said he was told Perry had done an online search, the Boys' Choir Web site had popped up and Perry had listened to the hymns there.

"They called and said they wanted us," Lee said.

Ben Crump, a Tallahassee lawyer and chairman of the choir's board of directors, said the choir deserves the opportunity because of its hard work, both at school and in rehearsals.

Crump said it was a great opportunity for Hollywood celebrities to experience "the world-renowned Boys' Choir of Tallahassee." But he wants the boys to be recognized not only for their craft but because "they worked against the odds to be successful young men."

The choir takes at-risk males, 8 to 18 years old, and uses music to foster academic success.

"We're happy for them and that people will see the greatness when they come together as one and celebrate life through music," Crump said.

Lee said the choir has been practicing diligently since the second week of August. It will be the only choir performing at the event, he said.

The choir will sing "Amazing Grace," which Perry told Lee was his favorite.

"He wants (the choir) to sound like angels and to look like angels," Lee explained.

Perry's studio is footing the entire cost of the trip, Crump said.

"The kids are very excited," Lee said. "They're overly ready for it."

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