

## EVENINGS OUT

# Priest and abuse victim's meeting is intense but elegant

## For Reasons that Remain Unclear

by Mart Crowley  
Dobama Theater

Reviewed by Christine McBurney

**Cleveland**—In what might be misread as a predictable drama on the page is played out on Dobama's stage as an elegant psychological thriller. Lenny Pinna directs the Midwest premiere of Mart Crowley's latest play *For Reasons that Remain Unclear*, which runs through November 9.

Crowley caused a sensation in 1968 when his play *The Boys in the Band* was staged. For the first time in American

theater history, gay men were portrayed as real people, not cartoons. In *For Reasons that Remain Unclear*, Crowley breaks ground again, exploring the long-term psychological effect of childhood sexual abuse, as well as the sociological questions raised by allegations of sexual crimes committed by members of the Catholic clergy.

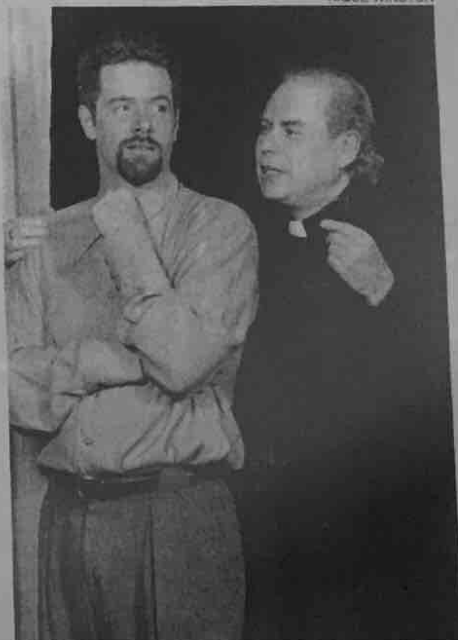
Patrick (Scott Plate), a Hollywood screenwriter on an all-expense-paid Roman holiday, invites Conrad (Mitchell Fields), an American priest visiting the Vatican, back to his hotel room for a nightcap. The two men are linked to each other by a horrible secret that, for now, only Patrick remembers. What follows is a cat-and-mouse game in which Patrick reveals the secret as well as his love-hate relationship with Hollywood, the Church, himself, and Conrad.

What could easily be a revenge plot is instead a spiritual quest. When Patrick tells Conrad it was he who molested him as a child, he speaks not of the horrors of abuse, but of emotional betrayal. He needs an explanation to release him from his hell. And Conrad not only begs his forgiveness, but is able to accept it, something he was unable to do with the absolution of a priest years ago.

Pinna's direction of his actors is thoughtful; they are not stereotypes. His staging is cinematic, with images resonating with religious symbolism and style reminiscent of 1940s Hollywood. Plate's intensity and restrained energy are as electric as any Mamet actor. The tension in the room is almost another character. Mitchell Fields, an actor usually cast as the clown, radiates as Conrad, bringing honesty, vulnerability, and pathos to a character who has committed a horrific deed.

In the introduction to an anthology of his works, Crowley describes writing *For Reasons that Remain Unclear* as a "way I fantasized . . . I'd exorcise my demons." Pinna and his actors have carefully completed this daunting task with delicate clarity.

RIQUE WINSTON



Patrick and Conrad spend an evening unraveling each other's dark secrets.

Christine McBurney is a theater artist and educator, and a regional correspondent for *In Theater* magazine.