

By The River

American Politics & Culture in the Early 21st Century

David Dekok, December 7, 2008,

Harry and Pete

I actually saw two plays in New York City yesterday, a good one on Broadway and a great one at the hole-in-the-wall Kraine Theater on E. 4th Street in the East Village.

The Broadway play was *Equus*, a revival of the Peter Shaffer play first staged in 1977 (which I also saw). The original Broadway production starred Anthony Hopkins as Dr. Martin Dysart, a psychiatrist, and Peter Firth as Alan Strang, a teenaged boy who blinded six horses in an act of madness. Now the roles are played by Richard Griffiths and Daniel Radcliffe. Griffiths is better known as the odious Uncle Vernon in the Harry Potter movies, and Radcliffe, of course, is Harry Potter himself.

This is a bleak, but moving drama of madness and obsession, which may be one reason it might not be appropriate for your Potter-obsessed pre-teen daughters. The other, as is fairly well-known by now, is that Radcliffe gets totally buck naked in the climactic scene in the play, as does the female character Jill Mason. I say fairly well-known because a teenaged girl sitting two seats down from me was shocked to discover this in the moments before the play opened and worried about whether her little sister should see it. The shock wore off, however.

After the curtain call--Radcliffe came out bare-chested--the cast auctioned off an *Equus* teeshirt to raise money for the Broadway Cares: Equity Fights AIDS campaign. It went for \$1,000, mainly because Radcliffe put it on and sweated it up. When he exited the stage door onto West 44th Street, it was like Elvis leaving the building. Police were there to control the throngs of autograph seekers--I just remember someone shoving a guitar toward him. Radcliffe is quite small in person and seemed tiny in contrast to the looming mass of fans.

Actor and playwright Joe Capozzi got a warm reception from the audience, too, but his was for courage in turning his own tragedy into great art.

"For Pete's Sake," directed by Robert Charles Gompers, is Capozzi's story of dealing with being sexually molested by a Catholic priest in northern New Jersey in the 1980s. Saturday's staged reading was the first performance of any kind for the play, but I suspect it will eventually ascend the mountain at least as far as Off Broadway. It was a powerful experience.

I was invited to "For Pete's Sake" by Tony Perry, who worked with me at the Patriot-News in Harrisburg, Pa., long ago and who was in an acting class with Capozzi. Most of the actors in the production were from that same class. As a reporter, I had become kind of jaded by priest abuse stories. I wondered what Capozzi could bring to the story to make it come alive.

But I needn't have worried. He uses a sort of "This Is Your Life" approach that includes liberal amounts of both humor and pathos. His abuse at the hands of Father Pete, a trusted family friend, and how he blamed himself initially for what had happened is brought to life largely through the words of people around him. Even better are the inner voices he hears berating and comforting him.

The performance was a benefit for Road to Recovery, an organization that aids victims of clergy abuse. Several other victims were in the audience and rose to be recognized after the play concluded.

