

REVIEW: The Boys In The Band
Buddies In Bad Times Theatre
By Lyla Miklos
The Q-Files Online
June 25, 1999

On Thursday night I had the pleasure of enjoying a staged reading of Mart Crowley's "The Boys in The Band" at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. I knew very little about Crowley's work other than a reference to it in the film "The Celluloid Closet". I knew it was originally written in the sixties and a film of it was made in the seventies. I had a fear that the stories and characters in the piece would be dated and no longer relevant to us queers today. Boy was I wrong!

The main character in "Boys" is Michael, performed brilliantly on Thursday by Kent Stains. Michael is like so many gay men I know and have known. Vulnerable and self-loathing with a thick coat of sarcasm, bitterness and snappy come backs to cover up and hide all the fear, guilt and insecurities inside. Michael struts around in fashionable clothes he cannot truly afford with a superficial air of sophistication that is based on an almanac of pop culture as reference.

Other characters in "Boys" are also easily recognizable, such as Emory (Edward Roy) – the poster child for queening out. During the show, it was grating to hear Emory make so many racially charged derogatory comments toward his black male lover Bernard (Cassel Miles), but Bernard explains it perfectly. "I allow him to do it". Why? Asks another character. "Because it makes him feel more powerful. I am better than him and he knows it and so do I, and if Uncle Tomming me makes him feel less pathetic, then I will let him."

Many of the characters in "Boys" are alcoholics, drug abusers and almost all have had therapy. Their lives are very unhealthy and unwholesome, and not at all happy. Unfortunately, all of these

elements are still very much a part of our community. Once again I was one of a handful of women in a sea of gay men while seeing this show, but I believe in this instance it made sense. The feelings expressed and issues addressed on stage were very male oriented. In our society men are told to be strong and not to cry and to deny anything that might be considered feminine, because being a female means being weak. So when a man finally admits and accepts that he is gay, a sense of maleness and hence a sense of power has been lost. To make up for this insecurity a power struggle ensues. I may be gay, but at least I'm not black, or unemployed, or disabled, or a queen or look like I'm gay. Empowering yourself by putting those who are weaker than you down is what I like to call school yard politics.

School yard politics is a part of the catty lingo and street talk that comes with being queer. As much as we fight for rights and equality, we tend to be our own worst enemies and tear each other apart from within. Our cattiness is the easiest defense mechanism we can rely on. A lot of this stems from internalized homophobia. We have been conditioned to believe that we are abnormal, evil, dirty a sin. This feeling never truly disappears. Sometimes, all it takes for me is one thoughtless and ignorant comment from a straight person to make me cringe and then question myself.

Harold (Sky Gilbert) declares to Michael in a pivotal moment in the show that Michael is a gay man who hates being gay and wishes he was straight. He says, "You could pretend to be straight. You could pretend and you could maybe even do it well, but deep down inside you are a gay man, and you know it, and you might as well deal with it."

While I watched "Boys" I sat beside an older gay man who teaches computers at a local college. He told me that when "Boys" first came out it was ground breaking and it was something "WE" needed. When intermission started he warned me that the second half of the show gets very depressing, but "WE" know better now. Do we?

In the second act of "Boys" Michael tortures his guests with a cruel party game. He tells each of them that they have to call the one person they ever truly loved and points will be rewarded for however far the scenario goes and the person with the most points wins. Through this game a lot of dramatically charged conflict brews up, simmers and boils over. The funny thing is I have seen this same destructive behaviour in action at gay get-togethers time and time again. "WE" might know better, but doing better is the challenge that we have yet to achieve.