NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In any friendship, one of the most wondrous and astounding moments is when a secret is confessed—something surprising, previously unknown, and quite private. It is pure revelation—a lightening crack of unprotected self, and when it is given from one person to another, being together, in the deepest sense, occurs.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN is about communion, which the dictionary first defines not as "a rite," but as "the act of sharing," and which in the play takes place between the actors and the audience. This communion can be an intense experience; I know because I have witnessed it. Seeing the play in a summer, sun-dappled country church in Massachusetts, or watching it in a frosty New York Off-Broadway theatre in January, over and over again I have seen the same thing happen: the performers look straight out at the audience, reveal their hidden spiritual selves, and in the act of sharing, make a connection.

William Faulkner, once asked for advice on writing, replied, "Don't tell any lies." The characters in *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN* don't tell any lies. They sit at a church service, and while the songs and prayers go on around them, they tell us what they are really thinking. In song, poem and monologue, they ask themselves and one another: "*Is* there a God? Does anything make sense? Why do I feel so alone?" And in the midst of the cosmic queries, they share their beliefs, secrets, guilts, solitudes, odd tales, funny stories, hopes and joys—all expressed within the shape of the formal church liturgy. (You might say that the audience hears what's going on both *inside* and *outside* the service, a sort of theatrical cubism, as it were.)

The framework of the play—the ritual of communion, or the mass—has been used by the church since its beginning and exists in parts: Songs of Praise, Lessons, The Creed, Prayers of the People, Confession, The Peace, Thanksgiving, the Lord's Prayer, and Communion.

To put it more simply, a group of people come together, say what they believe in, confess their inadequacies, ask forgiveness, and, having done that, join together hopefully to go out into the

world again. One character in the play sums it up: "This ritual is a *meal*, and therefore comforting."

There should be no sense of "right answers," doctrine or evangelism in the play; what binds the characters together is their common human journey. A New York reviewer said, "You don't have to be a churchgoer to love *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN*—you just have to be a human being with heart."

And Arthur Waskow, faculty member of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia wrote, "Jewish tradition says to be serious about life is to wrestle with God—not to bow down, not to walk away, but to wrestle. Seldom do you see God-wrestling in a synagogue *or* in a church. But in *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN*, here it is. How do I know it's God-wrestling? It's singing with joy while struggling with despair, and living life with a whole heart. The wrestling is powerful, the hearts are whole, and the music is wonderful!"

Here it is, then: whole hearts in the act of sharing. Communion. (And don't tell any lies.)

A good definition of theatre.

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