

Christopher S. Soden

You don't know what it's like

A performance piece for three men.

CHARACTERS

Man 1, age 17. Skateboarder, tats, baseball cap, layered shirts, jeans below boxers, Walkman. Angry, accusatory, unapologetic.

Man 2, age 27. Blue Collar. Flannel shirt, jeans, work boots. Not the Village People, Rough-Trade stereotype. Reflective, thoughtful, determined.

Man 3, age 46. Academic, but not stuffy or nerdy. Tweed jacket, glasses, khaki slacks, nice casual shoes. Melancholy, betrayed, painfully sincere. Barely restrained emotions.

Male Drummer

Male Interpreter for the Deaf

STAGE

Drummer standing downstage left, interpreter standing downstage right. Bare stage dark. Plain floors, neutral background, say off-white. No gray. LCD or super-titles mounted and centered above stage. Text of play will run across this display, in sync with the spoken delivery.

Drummer and interpreter enter and take their positions before the lights go down. They will begin when the performers begin speaking, as will the captioning. The interpreter should show emotion, but the drummer should not. The three players will be standing upstage, spread apart about arm's length. As each player speaks his first line, a single spot will illuminate him. As the piece progresses, the lights will gradually come full up. The players will form a triangle on the stage. Each time Man 1 speaks, the drummer will beat the drum, and each player will move into the next consecutive position in the triangle. When the line "Every day I ask myself" is spoken, a single spot should illuminate the trio. One minute after the last line, the stage should go completely black. The drummer stops.

Man 1: You don't know what it's like. To hear whispers.

Man 2: Snickers.

Man 3: Giggles.

Man 1: Every time you enter a room.

Man 2: Or leave one.

Man 3: You don't know what it's like.

Man 1: When they gape and stare.

Man 2: Like you're from Mars.

Man 3: Or the jungle.

Man 1: Or the gutter.

Man 2: Or the sideshow tent at the circus.

Man 3: You don't know what it's like.

Man 1: When they figure you must. Be a lush or a junkie or a slut. Lure little boys to your home. Keep a dungeon in your basement.

All Three: You don't know what it's like.

Man 2: When strangers walk up and spit in your hair.

Man 3: Stalk you like some pitiful beast.

Man 1: Wait for you in shadows.

Man 2: Come to your bars.

Man 3: Pretend to want you. So they can crush your bones and heart. So they can break you break you break you. Into a million small pieces. So they can lay into you. For being such a goddamn freak.

Man 1: You don't know what it's like.

Man 2: When your father.

Man 3: Your mother.

Man 1: Your brother.

Man 2: Your best friend.

Man 3: Your teacher.

Man 1: Your minister.

Man 2: Confiscates your manhood.

Man 3: Says you're not really a boy.

Man 1: What's wrong with you?

Man 2: You're one of the girls.

Man 3: I don't want to know.

Man 1: Why can't you act like a man?

Man 2: You don't know what it's like.

Man 3: When every guy you meet.

Man 2: Thinks you're after him.

Man 1: When they call you "faggot."

Man 3: And "fairy."

Man 1: And "sissy."

Man 2: And "queer."

Man 3: And "cocksucker."

Man 1: And "homo."

Man 2: And the biggest.

Man 3: Stupidest.

Man 1: Ugliest.

Man 2: Meanest.

Man 3: Bastard in the whole school. Thinks God put you here. For him to abuse and torture and humiliate.

Man 2: You don't know what it's like.

Man 1: To be kicked and mauled and beaten and tied to a tree.

Man 2: Or a fence.

Man 3: Or a goal post.

Man 1: Or held down.

Man 2: And raped.

Man 3: By a gang of boys.

Man 1: One.

Man 2: By one.

Man 3: By one.

Man 1: Over.

Man 2: And over.

Man 3: And over.

Man 1: Because they think that's what you want.

Man 2: This will teach you a lesson.

Man 3: You must answer to them.

Man 1: You don't know what it's like.

Man 3: You must answer to them.

Man 2: When you can't fight back.

Man 3: You must answer to them.

Man 1: And you don't know why.

Man 3: You must answer to them.

Man 1: And you don't want to make.

Man 2: The same mistake.

Man 3: Again, again, again.

Man 1: And yes, you are scared.

Man 2: Of course you're scared.

Man 3: When your father hates you.

Man 1: And you think he should.

Man 3: And you know, you know, you know. That guys, guys, guys.

Man 2: Can only connect.

Man 1: When they're whaling on each other.

All Three: You don't know what it's like.

Man 2: When you're together.

Man 3: In the locker room.

Man 1: Or swimming pool.

Man 2: Or changing room.

Man 3: And they turn away.

Man 1: Like you're some monster, or creature or ghou. Who would jump them if you could.

All Three: You don't know what it's like.

Man 1: When they say.

Man 2: You must be reformed.

Man 3: Or pitied.

Man 1: Or cured.

Man 2: Or discouraged.

Man 3: Or stopped.

Man 1: Or murdered for God.

Man 2: You don't know what it's like. When they say you're recruiting. Or molesting. Or asking for it.

All Three: You don't know what it's like.

Man 1: To always.

Man 2: Always.

Man 3: Always.

Man 2: Every day, of every hour, of every minute, of every moment of your life to understand. You're just being indulged.

Man 3: Or tolerated.

Man 1: Or despised.

Man 2: Or mocked.

Man 3: You don't fucking fucking fucking.

Man 1: Know what it's like.

Man 2: Every day.

Man 3: You can't know how it feels.

Man 1: You can't.

Man 2: You cannot know.

Man 3: How it feels.

All Three: Every day I ask myself.

Man 1: What did I do?

Man 2: What did I do?

Man 3: What did I do?

CURTAIN