

Wexner Center Performance Space

BOB

Conceived and directed by Anne Bogart, created and performed by Will Bond

"You can't explain theatre," Bob explains, "you have to experience it." So, if I were smart, I'd stop right there. But I'm not, so I won't. Neither, of course, did Bob. Bob is Robert Wilson, the legendary theatre director born in Waco, Texas in 1941, who brought us the eight hour "Deafman Glance" (1970), the seven day "Overture to Ka Mountain" (1972), the Philip Glass collaboration "Einstein on the Beach" (1976), and the work so monumental that it has never been performed in its entirety, "the CIVIL warS" (1983).

"BOB" is the new Anne Bogart work that had its world premiere at the Wexner Center February 5-8, 1998. Even at its much more modest ninety minutes, "BOB" is a torrent of words and gestures with an accessible surface and a whole space-time continuum of complications underneath. You might call it theatre about theatre about theatre. You might also call it spellbinding and breathtaking.

Using just one man, one table, one chair, one glass and one glass quart bottle of milk, a battery of lights, and a few snippets of music and manipulations of sound, the Saratoga International Theatre Institute collaboration offers insight into both Wilson and his work. A stylized Wilson, to be sure, giddy and serious, taking a moment to explain and an eternity to exemplify. Simple statements about the nature of performance, the interaction between the internal images of individual audience members and the images shared on stage are juxtaposed with visual mini-epics on the pouring and drinking of milk or the moving of furniture.

Wilson, whose dream-like works were heavily influenced by his work with brain damaged children, often takes everyday action and slows it down, breaking it into tiny parts and examining each part in minute detail. Gesture is carefully orchestrated, with repetition encouraging scrutiny from different perspectives and in multiple contexts. Bogart borrows many of Wilson's techniques to reconstruct parts of his life and present some of his major theories of performance.

Will Bond's portrayal of Wilson teeters on the edge of homage and caricature. It's a mostly mechanical and choreographed Wilson, but there is one passage where Wilson casually relates a story of just barely catching planes where a personality of storyteller and eccentric bubbles through.

Of the three Anne Bogart works I have now seen -- "Going, Going, Gone" at Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival, "The Medium" and now "BOB" at the Wexner Center -- none has been less than an extraordinary experience. And that, according to both Wilson and Bogart, is what theatre is all about.

The Saratoga International Theatre Institute's "BOB," conceived and directed by Anne Bogart, created and performed by Will Bond,