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Fascinating star can't keep unanchored 'Bob' afloat

By Pat Craig
TIMES STAFF WRITER

"Bob," presented by San Francisco's Magic Theatre, comes off a little like watching a 3-D movie with one eye closed — you know there's a lot going on, but you don't know exactly what.

Only with "Bob," you don't have the least bit of energy or interest in opening the other eye to find out.

Will Bond, who stars in the one-man show by Anne Bogart's SITI Company, is a delight — visually fascinating and in control of the out-of-control monologue snatched by Bogart from years of rambling musings by avant-garde director/artist Robert Wilson.

"Hello," he says at the beginning, "I'm Bob."

And an extremely fine Bob he is, playing the talented Mr. Wilson as he speaks his passion about art — something, he says at the beginning of the piece, he creates, then leaves to others to explain.

"I draw pictures, I don't draw meanings," he says.

Then for the majority of the show, he draws conclusions and tries very hard to define his relationship with art and his deepest feelings — as he emerges from a Texas childhood and a European adulthood — about the restless urge to create.

It's quite apparent that he was right about not drawing meanings. The monologue becomes increasingly muddled, contradictory and confusing, and it slowly disintegrates, like one of those burgundy-laced all-night conversations about angels dancing on the heads of pins or the nature of beauty.

Actually, the show works much better as a choreographed tone poem. The rising and falling of Bond's voice and his theatrically stylized movements become a mesmerizing sort of dance program with all the abstract meaning you're interested

THEATER REVIEW

■ **WHAT:** "Bob," conceived by Anne Bogart

■ **WHERE:** Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center, Pier 2, S.F.

■ **WHEN:** Tuesdays-Sundays through March 31

■ **HOW MUCH:** \$22-\$47

■ **CONTACT:** 415-441-8822, www.magictheatre.org

enough of that, but in a much more compelling way, a couple of weeks ago in "Room," a one-woman show with an actress playing author Virginia Woolf.

One was enough.

Two is excessive.

Three is not planned. A good idea.

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in bringing to it.

Unfortunately, if you don't know or care that much about Robert Wilson, the angular writhing and ranting on-stage is just too much. There is no particular reason to do anything more than allow the piece — which, at an hour and a half, is about 90 minutes too long — to wash over you.

"Bob" was created by Bogart and dramaturg Jocelyn Clarke from words spoken by Wilson during his 30-year career. The material all comes from print interviews and recorded conversations with the artist, whose work includes "Deafman Glance," a "silent opera" created in collaboration with Raymond Andrews, a deaf-mute boy Wilson had adopted; and a work called "Einstein on the Beach," created with composer Philip Glass.

All of the words in "Bob" were spoken at one time or another by Wilson and they are coupled with Bogart-created physical images, some of which have Bond moving a table containing a bottle of milk and a metal armchair in geometric patterns around the stage.

Wilson is quoted in the piece as saying, "You can't explain theater; you have to experience it."

But here we experience something that becomes overly precious and toweringly pretentious at the same time. We already got