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Actor Will Bond introduces himself: "Hello, my name is Bob. You're absolutely fantastic and I'd love to work with you!"

THEATER AS PICTURES

A SOLO PORTRAIT OF AVANT-GARDE DIRECTOR ROBERT WILSON

By Mark de la Viña
Mercury News

Who needs the Biography Channel when there's Anne Bogart and the SITI Company?

The director and her avant-garde cohorts from New York have created a series of theatrical portraits of Orson Welles, Marshall McLuhan, Virginia Woolf and other major cultural figures. Perhaps none of these ruminations basks in the pure theatrical experience embodied by "Bob," the troupe's piece about hyper-visual director Robert Wilson. The Magic Theatre opened "Bob," in association with the SITI Company, Wednesday night at the Cowell Theater in San Francisco.

Roaming a dreamy landscape as it toys with space, movement, time and the relationship between artist and audience, "Bob" stubbornly refuses to spell everything out. Striking imagery, deafening blasts of

■ BOB

Conceived by Anne Bogart, text adapted by Jocelyn Clarke, produced by the Magic Theatre and the SITI Company

The upshot: This fiercely theatrical piece uses the vocabulary of avant-garde theater director Robert Wilson to examine his legacy.

Where: Cowell Theatre, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco

When: 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 2:30 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays

Through: March 31

Running time: 1 hour, 25 minutes without intermission

Tickets: \$27-\$42; (415) 441-8822 or www.magictheatre.org

music and the words of the Texas-born director of "Einstein on the Beach" combine to form a mysterious terrain that invites us to consider the theatrical form from al-

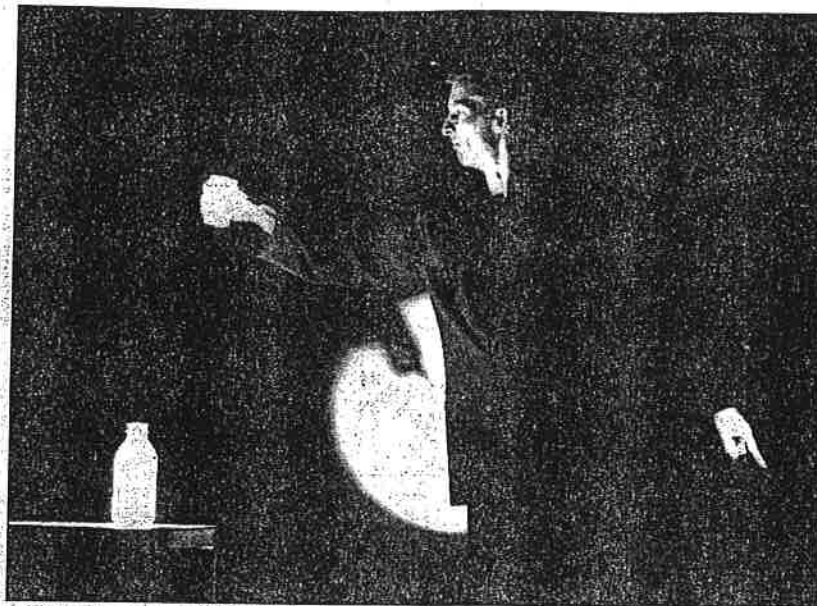
ternate perspectives.

Bogart developed "Bob" by collecting excerpts from hundreds of interviews with and speeches by Wilson. Irish dramaturge Jocelyn Clarke boiled them down into an often comical 30-page script of fragments and personal memories. Though "Bob" presents some gamesome glimpses of how Wilson works, the loneliness of the artist — especially one who had to seek commissions outside of his native country — permeates the piece.

Exposition is an afterthought in "Bob." Wilson, trained as a painter and architect, creates intensely deliberate theatrical moments when movement is sometimes slowed to a turtle's pace. A lighting cue can turn something as ordinary as a bottle of milk into an arresting image of beauty. Bogart and SITI explore and draw from the uneasy re-

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BOB | Striking images portray life of avant-garde director

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relationship between the visual and verbal as they examine

Wilson with the anti-naturalistic performance vocabulary he developed.

"You can't explain theater,

you have to experience it," says actor Will Bond, who plays Wilson, in the line that best sums up both Wilson and "Bob."

A member of the SITI ensemble, Bond is a balletic gem as Wilson. He portrays the artist as an amiable outsider who introduces himself to theatergoers by saying

"Hello, my name is, Bob. You're absolutely fantastic and I'd love to work with you!" And work he does. Bond spins in place like a whirlwind dervish. He takes moments that seem like 20 minutes to polish

off a glass of milk. His graceful gestures and intricate, often minute movements are a choreographic tribute to the artistic traits of the man he's playing. When Bond-as-Wilson says "I draw pictures, I don't draw meanings," he paraphrases Wilson's canon.

"Bob" is a loving nod to an influential cultural icon — and another slice of theatrical reverie from the always adventurous Bogart and company.

Contact Mark de la Viña at mdelavina@sjmercury.com or call (408) 920-5914.