

PERFORMANCE

BY STEFFEN SILVIS

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Two productions explore the possibilities of theater.

BOB AND BHULE

STAGE PREVIEW

"Naturalism has ruined the theater!"

Rather than a cry from the heart, Robert Wilson's exclamation is a call to arms. As one of America's leading theater-makers, Wilson has been at the forefront in the struggle for the soul of the American stage. What Wilson and a phalanx of other artists are striving to save is the very bedrock of theater: mystery. There is a theater that emphasizes process over product and prefers experience to explanation. "The purpose of art," said James Baldwin, "is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers." Wilson's work, and that of his peers and protégés, is a modern tilt toward theater's Dionysian past—a return to mystery without the hierophants' guesses.

This week sees the opening of two very different productions that share Wilson's views. Although both are by ensemble-based companies that have absorbed ancient performance traditions and rituals, one is a world-renowned troupe with codified theo-

ries, while the other is a new Portland-based group embarking on its own discoveries. The former production is Annie Bogart's *Bob*, produced by the Saratoga International Theater Institute and sponsored by PICA. The latter is Sowetu Theater's premiere of a new play by Tania Myren entitled *The Further Adventures of Anse and Bhule in No-Mans Land*.

It's no accident that *Bob* appears closer to Robert Wilson's philosophy of theater, as Wilson is the "Bob" of the title. Bogart's piece (though she prefers the term "essay") was developed last year in partnership with actor Will Bond and other SITTI artists, and has toured throughout the world with Bond playing Wilson. Although *Bob* is a collage of Wilson's theories and anecdotes of his life, it is not mere biologie. In a conversation with *WW*, Bond referred to Wilson's essays as "a jumping-off point for a discussion of other mat-

ters," thus audiences needn't arrive with any real knowledge of Wilson or his work to fully appreciate the piece. "It's the story of a man named Bob, an artist who creates in public," Bond said. "It's also an exploration of the crisis of creating."

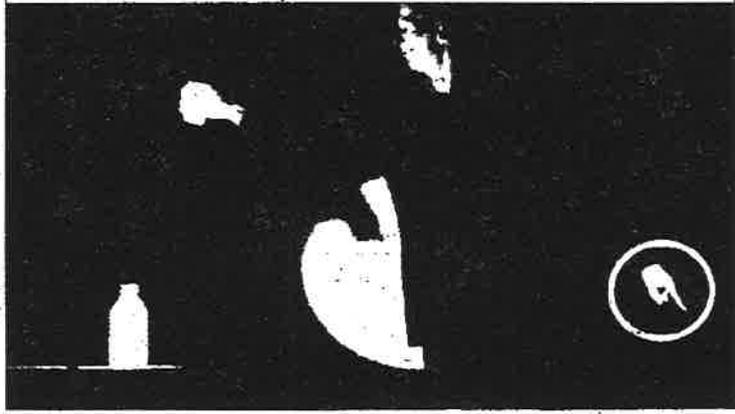
On an expanse of stage there is a table, a chair and a luminous bottle and glass of milk. These simple props become the laboratory equipment for *Bob's* genius. *Bob* is elliptical out of necessity, as words fail to keep pace with the mind's hive of voices. Questions of space, time and the very fragmentation of experience are the substance of *Bob* but not the sum of him. Bogart and Bond never attempt to explain Wilson, believing, as Wilson does, that we must interpret for ourselves. "I draw pictures," Wilson has said. "I don't create meaning. The audience creates meaning." One shared conclusion reached by *Bob's* audiences is that this is an electric and brilliantly humorous monologue.

Bond is a founding member of the Saratoga International Theater Institute, which was created by Annie Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki in 1992.

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Bob
SITTI with PICA
at the Northwest
Neighborhood
Cultural Center
1819 NW Everett
St., 242-1419
8 pm Friday
Saturday, Jan. 15-16
\$14-\$17

Small props go a long way: Will Bond in *Bob*.



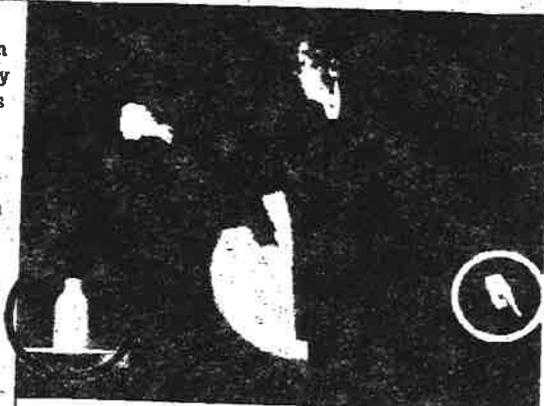
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The Further Adventures of Anse and Bhule in No-Mans Land
 Sowelu Theater
 at the Back Door
 Theater
 4319 SE Hawthorne
 Blvd., 230-2090
 8 pm Thursdays-
 Saturdays,
 4 pm Sundays
 Opens Jan. 15
 \$6-\$15

Though Bond still works on occasion in regional profit theaters, his primary work is with the institute. Three years ago he had a chance to work with Wilson on a piece entitled *Persephone*, which gave Bond further insights into Wilson's character. When asked if Wilson has seen *Bob*, Bond said that he has only seen a video of it. "He's been very encouraging," said Bond, "though he seems reluctant to see it live. Yet he always tells people to go if they can." Though *Bob* has now toured for a year, Bond and Bogart still meet to discuss the essay's progress. "We're a company that keeps all of our work in mind," said Bond. "We are always reinvestigating."

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There is enthusiasm within the theater community for STII to restage some of its past essays, including *Small Lives/Big Dreams*, a piece about five people who survive an unnamed catastrophe and try to reconstruct civilization from bits of Chekhov plays. A similar struggle in a post-apocalyptic landscape takes place in Tania Myren's new play, *The*



Will Bond will teach an actors' workshop on the Suzuki and Viewpoint methods at the Portland Actors Conservatory, (1436 SW Montgomery St., 242-1419) at 1 pm Saturday, Jan. 16. \$10-\$12.

Further Adventures of Anse and Bhule in No-Mans Land; which Sowelu Theater is premiering this month. Upon first reading the play, one imagines that in a parallel universe, something went horribly wrong on Earth in the year 1400. Myren has created a hybrid-pidgin English for some of her characters that can only be described as Chaucerian. Anse and Bhule, played by Barry Hunt and Chris Harder, are brethren in a catastrophe cult that moves across the seared landscape, cleaning away human remains. Their lives are permanently altered after they meet a woman named Persephone (Kelly Tallent) and her mother (the excellent Lorraine Bahr), who lead them toward finding redemption. Myren wrote the play at UCLA in 1992 and has been working

"Theater's function is to remind us of the big human issues, to remind us of our terror and our humanity.... Many of us sleep through our lives. Art should offer experiences that alter these patterns."

—Anne Bogart

on it since then. "The play came to me in a strange way," Myren told *WW*. "I heard the word 'carking' [a Middle English word for 'troubling and distressing' still used in Scots dialect] and I thought that I would have to use the word in a play. Later, as I was waiting in line to see a film, I saw a man in my mind say the word to another man." Anse and Bhule were born from that image.

Myren is an award-winning playwright who relocated to Portland 10 months ago. She found herself working with Gretchen Corbett, an old friend from Los Angeles. Corbett, long a supporter of Myren's work, had been waiting for a chance to direct *Anse and Bhule*. With the recent founding of Sowelu, Corbett at last had a company prepared to meet the challenges posed in Myren's play. Along with invented language, there is ritual in *Anse and Bhule*, much of it inspired by Myren's readings of 12th-century church recitations. Corbett's production incorporates masks and dance in the rites. "It's been a thrilling experience for me," said Myren. "I'm excited by Sowelu's process."

Jon Jory has written that Anne Bogart's work has reclaimed the theater from the media. Happily, small companies like Sowelu are following suit.