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Bob

nytheatre.com review

Julie Congress · January 21, 2012

They say you should practice what you preach, and *Bob* is one of the most vivid examples I have seen of that. After having the privilege of studying with performer and SITI Company founding member Will Bond at Skidmore College, it was a true joy to see him in *Bob*. The SITI Company is dedicated to education—most every actor in New York has at least come in contact with the Viewpoints—and it was truly inspiring to see how allied the training and the performance is. Don't get me wrong, *Bob* is in no way an extended Viewpointing session, but it hits their signature precision, creativity and full-body engagement every second of the way.

This show makes you want to achieve greatness.

Bob, a solo show from the SITI Company, is inspired by, and uses the words of, experimental theatre director Robert Wilson. It does not replicate the man or his style, but sheds light on them. It's as if Picasso painted a piece to show someone how Cezanne painted—it's not a replica, it's still a Picasso, but it lets us see and understand Cezanne in a new way, while simultaneously letting us see how Cezanne influenced Picasso. For ninety minutes, Will Bond takes on the persona of (or a persona inspired by) Bob Wilson, telling, non-linearly, and showing us (with a lot of parenthetical asides) the inspirations, context and style of the seminal avant-garde artist.

This is not a show you lose yourself in—my mind was constantly on. I thought and observed and made

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connections much more than I felt...except for the sound and lights. The sound and lights are delightfully manipulative. A moment that should be mundane is made, through design, heart-poundingly suspenseful. It was such a clear lesson in how emotions can be made. In a show like *War Horse*, or most any motion picture, the director guides the audiences' emotions through music, and we are aware of it only to the smallest degree, if at all. But *Bob* is like a magician showing his tricks—director Anne Bogart and designers Brian H. Scott (lights) and Darron L. West (soundscape) deliberately, blatantly, shamelessly create tone and emotion where they should not exist. And it's brilliant, because what better to do in a show about a director than to show HOW a director creates a world!

Will would caution us in class not to play into the mood of the music, that there is more interest in the contrast, in the fight between the opposites. So, while the lights and sound are painting one very specific picture, setting us in a foreign country or on a stage or in a childhood memory, Will surprises us, creating more layers, more texture. Even in its utmost simplicity, it's not all one thing, there are always multiple things happening in a given moment, making it complex and dynamic while balancing the line between synchronicity and contrast.

The utmost import is given to the smallest, most pedestrian things. Bob at one point says that there is too much going on in any moment and he seeks to highlight, to make us really see, things we so often glance over. Thus a pitcher of milk, with a pin-spot dramatically illuminating it, becomes the most important thing in the world. Everything is simultaneously commonplace and magical, which makes it accessibly artful. Will pours a glass of milk (what is more ordinary!)—but he fills it up completely to the top without ever looking at it, never spilling a drop. Because of the focus and deliberateness with which it is executed, this act feels dangerous. As Robert Wilson said, "A good actor can command an audience by moving one finger." Will Bond, who worked with Wilson, epitomizes this.

The words are Robert Wilson's, but the production is distinctly SITI. *Bob* is an experience not to be missed.

Opened: January 19, 2012

Closes: January 29, 2012

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