

Bob

Conceived by Anne Bogart
Reviewed by Alexis Greene

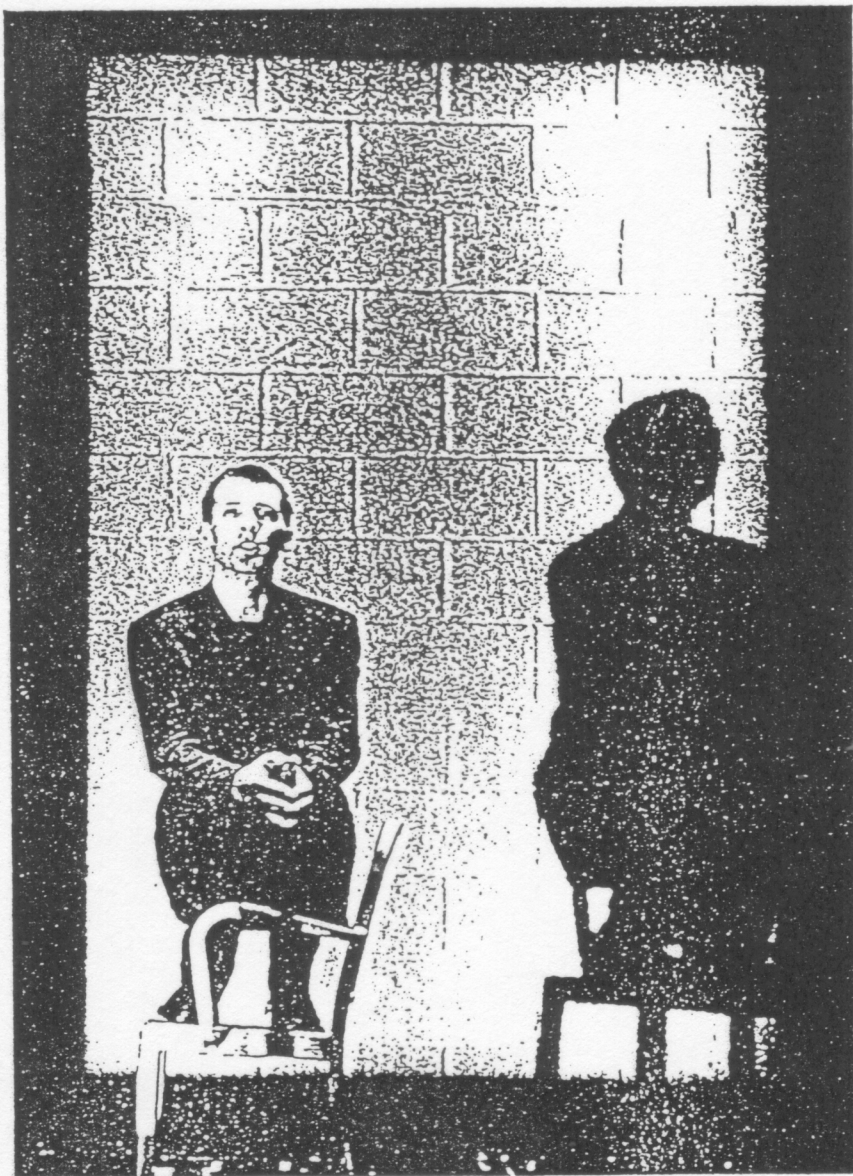
A paean to theater — startling, iconoclastic, nonrealistic theater. Theater where gesture is a text all its own, where light and sound are their own language, and where gesture, light, and sound are not driven by words. That's Robert Wilson's theater, and Anne Bogart's.

Both are on display at New York Theater Workshop in *Bob*, the breathtaking performance based on Wilson's life and work, conceived and directed by Bogart, created and portrayed by Will Bond. The production was originally developed at the Saratoga International Theater Institute (SITI), which Bogart and the Japanese director and acting teacher Tadashi Suzuki founded in 1992 to broaden the horizons of American theater. Anyone who cares about performance and theater should see it.

The piece begins in the downstage left corner of a shallow platform. Here Bond, a lean-faced, lean-bodied man in a dark suit, sits on a metallic chair, back to the audience, left arm stretched out and down at a 45-degree angle. Mimi Jordan Sherin's precise lighting puts him in silhouette. Diagonally across the platform, white light beams down on a full, glass bottle of milk, which rests on a square table.

The pose, the sparseness, and the odd, humorous image are so Wilson that, depending on your taste for this avant-garde director and visual artist, you will either smile or smirk in recognition. But part of the joy of watching *Bob* is that you

don't know where Wilson begins and Bogart begins. Except for one line about a kite, the verbal text — which has been arranged by Irish critic and dramaturg Jocelyn Clarke — is all Wilson. The lighting, the emotive soundscape by Daron L. West, Neil Patel's set, and most of all Bond's performance, merge Wilson's love of disparate theatrical elements with Bogart's ability to make theater operate on several colliding levels at once.



Will Bond in *Bob*, conceived and directed by Anne Bogart, created and performed by Bond.

How does this happen? In most contemporary American theater, the verbal text dominates. In *Bob*, it is hard to say what element, if any, holds sway over the others. Words, time, light, music, and the actor's movement through space interlock and interact. Perhaps it is best to go to the words themselves for clues to Wilson's art and to what Bogart is

doing: "Theater has to be about one thing first. Then it can be about a million things." "Rules are made to be broken; you must always contradict yourself." "Space for me is something that is horizontal, and time is vertical."

The scenic glories get your attention first. Neil Patel's set is not conventional in any sense. On either side of the shallow platform, two high walls of black metal pipes hold Sherin's array of mammoth lighting strips and instruments, for these lights, in various shapes and sizes and covered with a rainbow of colored gels, are in fact the set.

The lighting itself is beyond magical. Sherin paints with it, suffusing the space with unique ochres and greens. She frames with it, dividing the platform into squares. In one aesthetically astounding moment, a rectangle of golden light suddenly sweeps across the white wall at the back of the stage as though a gigantic door were opening. Like West's sound — which crashes and echoes like broken glass one moment, rises to an intense, romantic roar the next — Sherin's lighting is its own language.

Interacting with these aesthetic texts is Bond, moving along the sides of the platform, periodically pushing the square table from corner to corner and sitting opposite in the chair. Without looking, he fills a glass with milk and stops pouring just as he reaches the rim. He crosses the stage on a diagonal, making abstract gestures but speaking about concrete things. With his body he carves space and plays coyly with time; he talks about art, theater, and occasionally about growing up in Waco, Texas. By the end, Bond, Bogart, and Wilson