

'BOB' monologue explores very reasons behind theater

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Who is Bob? What is *BOB*?

Those are among the questions that choreographer-director Anne Bogart and actor Will Bond have asked about the show having its world premiere this week in the Wexner Center for the Arts.

Answers on one level are easy: *BOB* was inspired by the life and career of avant-garde director Robert Wilson, famous for his elaborate experiments (*Einstein on the Beach*, the *CIVIL WAR*S).

On a deeper level, anything goes.

"In all our pieces, we ask the big question: Why do theater at all?" Bond said. "Since this piece is based on a living, working theater director, that question becomes a little more important."

In the 90-minute show, "Bob" talks about art and theater using the words of Wilson.

"Probably some of what the character says might be recognized by many people as things said by the living theater director," Bond said.

At the same time, potential audiences don't have to know much about Wilson to "be allowed into the play," he said.

The piece, a Saratoga International Theatre Institute collaboration, explores the struggle of artists to be successful — or just

to survive — in a commercial culture.

"Exile is a theme," Bond said, "and so is acceptance, the country and culture as one's father, and personal issues of family and relationships."

Like *The Medium*, which Bogart's institute presented last year at the Wexner Center, the material is culled from transcripts.

"Anne and I sat down and organized 80 pages of material into questions: What is the landscape of Bob? What are Bob's personal reasons for doing theater? What is it to be an American artist?"

Eventually they condensed, edited and "sampled" the material into a 90-minute monologue.

"The physical questions are asked rigorously, and the physical score of the character is meticulously laid out. We had to create it in such a way that I could begin at the beginning, do the choreography and stand without the words."

Bond, 37, played Marshall McLuhan in *The Medium*, Bogart's first original Saratoga show.

"Playing the central character in *The Medium* was like being shot out of a rocket. *BOB* has that youthful velocity and energy, but it's contained in a more still package. . . . Most plays today speed up time, but Bob says in *BOB* that his plays try to slow it down."



Megan Wanlass

Will Bond as director Robert Wilson

The collaborative Bogart troupe may have begun as a summer institute in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., but troupe members perform year-round these days and often rehearse in New York City, where much of *BOB* was developed.

"Each of Anne's pieces is vastly

■ The Wexner Center for the Arts will present *BOB* at 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday at 1871 N. High St. Tickets cost \$14, or \$10.50 for center members; call 292-3535.

different, and yet they all are distinct," said Bond, who is in Columbus with other troupe members for a three-week residency at Ohio State University. "This project takes us back to our original question of how we work as a company in this country."

The institute doesn't have a space, so it sometimes presents shows in Japan, where the concept of *BOB* was born on tour; at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville, Ky.; or at the New York Theatre Workshop, which launched *Rent*.

"We've been all over the world for seven years," Bond said. "This time, we're doing a Wexner Center premiere. We're dependent on the institutions that invite us to stage new works. It would be nice to premiere works at home, but that's not really possible."

BOB "is so young in its life. *BOB* still wants to find out what it is. As an actor in a new piece, it's very scary to start speaking words about it. *BOB* is a machine or scaffolding that I have to climb each night."