

Abstract show bobs to surface

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Roll over, Beethoven — and Marlene Dietrich, too. Let avant-garde director Robert Wilson tell Anne Bogart the news: *BOB* rocks.

Whether the audience gets rolled is another question, difficult to answer, but stay tuned: One famous director's elegantly stylized portrait of another famous director offers enough beauty, mystery and oblique biography to attract more than the

usual Wexner arts crowd.

BOB, which opened last night to a sold-out audience in the Wexner performance space, reaffirms the value of the Wexner

Center's relationship with Bogart's Saratoga International Theater Institute. She made a local splash last season with *The Medium*, and *BOB* should make a national splash — of milk and other more abstract forms of nourishment.

The first symbolic act of the 90-minute one-man show is actor Will Bond's minute adjustment of a spotlit glass of milk on a table before returning to his distant chair.

Bogart may follow some basic rules of dramaturgy — if a glass of milk is introduced in the opening scene, it will be drunk by the last — but much of *BOB* breaks the rules. That's appropriate, since Bob Wilson became an international success (*Einstein on the Beach*, the *CIVIL warS*) by breaking new ground with intensely visual opera and play productions that transcend the texts.

Bond moves with mathematical precision to the vivid sounds of Dietrich, Beethoven and machinery, but it's the surrealistic math of Lewis Carroll and Salvador Dali.

Bond's impish persona may well

reflect aspects of the real-life Wilson, but *BOB*'s Bob is unquestionably inhabited by the spirits of Warhol (the subject of a recent Bogart world premiere), P.T. Barnum, Timothy Leary and Marshall McLuhan.

A few personal issues bob to the surface — especially Wilson's quizzical relationship with his drawling Texas parents — but sink under the weight of Wilson's anti-naturalism and Bogart's canny complicity.

Wilson directed 12 premieres in 10 months last year, but he doesn't

“know exactly why.” Nor does Bogart attempt to explain. Instead, *BOB* revels in her word-salad approach, quoting Wilson on Wilson on theater. Is he an innovator or a

THEATER REVIEW

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

poseur? Her answer: yes and no.

Some lines risk self-parody, but there's no use crying over spilt milk for Bogart is an acquired taste. She prefers mystery to clarity, experience to explanation, design over text, and the medium over the message. Isn't that what acquiring minds want to know?

Reminiscent of Madonna's *Vogue* dance-video, at other times as static as an Andy Warhol movie but always just fast (or slow) enough, *BOB* exudes trendiness — including an allusion to Monica Lewinsky.

Wilson is a jetsetter and name-dropper, and *BOB*'s glossy surfaces and geometric planes blithely explore the mathematical intersection of modern celebrity and artistry.

“I draw pictures. I don't create meaning,” Bond says Wilson says. “The audience creates meaning.”

That's your mission, fearless theatergoers, if you choose to accept it. This review deconstructs in five minutes; *BOB* lasts through Sunday; Wilson's career, somewhat longer.