

REVIEWS

MOVIES, MUSIC AND THEATER OPENINGS AND PERFORMANCES

New Anne Bogart play explores audience-actor relationship

By JUDITH EGERTON

Courier-Journal Critic

"If you close your eyes, what will you remember?"

The question is asked of an actor portraying a theatergoer in Anne Bogart's new play, "Cabin Pressure."

If one poses the same question about "Cabin Pressure," which opened last night at Actors Theatre of Louisville, one scene after another will pass through the mind's eye.

Theater review

"Cabin Pressure"

Next performances:
At Actors Theatre of
Louisville, noon and
7:30 p.m. today, 8 p.m.
tomorrow. In repertory
through March 28.

"Cabin Pressure" is the result of Bogart's study of an audience's role in theater. The play — performed by five collaborators and members of the Saratoga International Theatre

Institute — defies conventional theater and spoofs those who overly intellectualize theater and audience responses to it. Bogart seems to be poking a bit of fun at herself, too.

And perhaps critics. Here, I close my eyes and see the actors standing behind microphones in various postures of intellectual weariness. They wear trendy sunglasses and jabber away, not listening to each other, as they deconstruct a play's meaning in lofty and ridiculous language.

Bogart also pokes fun at excessive sensitivity

to audience reactions. Outside the entrance to ATL's Victor Jory Theatre, a sign warns that the play contains strobe lights, loud gunshots, strong language, nudity, cigarette smoke, graphic violence, live animals, bright lights, a fog machine and adult subject matter.

For Bogart, there is no theater without startling the audience with inventive movement, unusual sound and daring lighting. Although "Cabin Pressure" has no gunshots nor live animals, it has its surprising moments. Still, it's tame compared to Bogart's production of the jarring "Miss Julie" and her unforgettable production of Noel Coward's "Private Lives," both staged at ATL.

"Cabin Pressure" is a short (1½ hour) symposium on audience-actor relationships and theatrical history, from Restoration comedy to British murder mysteries to "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" It will play much better with theater-insiders than novices. However, even a first-time theatergoer will come away from the play — the final entry in this year's Humana Festival of New American Plays — with a mind reeling with images and the central theme that theater is a uniquely shared artistic experience.

Bogart, director of graduate theater studies at Columbia University, created the play by opening up the process to a focus group, who watched rehearsals and offered their reactions.

In one amusing and disconcerting scene, the cast of "Cabin Pressure" illustrate the facial expressions and body language of an audience while staring at the audience in the Victor Jory. The excellent cast — Will Bond, Ellen Lauren, Kelly Maurer, Barney O'Hanlon and Stephen Webber — will be familiar to ATL regulars.