

Fasten Your Seatbelts!

Anne Bogart's "Cabin Pressure"

Actually, Anne Bogart's new opus, "Cabin Pressure" is not about using your Delta Frequent Flyer Miles. As developed by her SITI Company, it is more apt to give audiences cabin-fever. And, as staged in the intimate Victor Jory Theatre – from which there is no easy escape once a performance is underway – that was certainly my reaction.

Even before we entered the theatre, we heard some loud and raucous lines of Noel Coward's "Private Lives" being forcefully rehearsed. We were prevented from taking our seats at the accustomed time. I knew this was not because Dylan Thomas was in the basement completing "Under Milk Wood" just before curtain –time. This purpose-planned delay was one of those Grotowski effects: The longer they wait, the more their expectations will mount.!"

Thomas, Coward, and Grotowski are all dead. But the legacy of the latter lives on. As does that of Richard Schechner, though he seldom now puts it into practice. He can leave that to Anne Bogart. Indeed, during one of the discussion-sessions in the actual production-in which cast-members offered personal reactions to performances – I was much reminded of several intellectual-recesses in Chechner's watershed avant-garde

theatre-event, “Dionysus in ‘69” in which actors were encouraged to discuss their cats and other pets.

Only afterward did I learn that “Cabin Pressure” was developed over two years of SITI cast-members talking with Actor Theatre audiences. The no-brained and hare-brained comments which they uttered had apparently been abstracted from all this rich treasure of Oral History. This was the Oreο-filling between seemingly endless and certainly strident repetitions – with some slight variations – of Coward’s Private Lives” and Edward Albee’s “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” Even the audience-comments were recycled. That certainly made the point that, yes, we actors do do this over and over and over again. Preferably without too much variation.

As was the case with Schneckner and Grotowski in their day, this was received by many as only slightly less impressive than Charlton Heston descending from Mount Sinai with the Tablets of the Law. I must record my admiration, however, for the considerable talents and physical attractions of Will Bond, Ellen Lauren, Kelly Maurer, Barney, O’Hanlon, and Stephen Webber. It would be great to see them in a real play. Something by Coward or Albee, perhaps?

As for “Cabin Pressure”, I was more impressed by the people who were impressed by it. One great admirer – and of Anne Bogart’s talents and methods in general – was Brian McMaster, Artistic Director of the Edinburgh Festival. My question was: What will the Edinburgh Festival public make of the hash of Louisville audience-comments? Wouldn’t it make more sense to invite Bogart and SITI to Edinburgh this August – so they can play it all back at Festival 2000/ Will Bond in a kilt would be a hoot. Ellen Lauren with a bagpipe ditto. Let Them Eat Haggis!

Or Bogart could recycle the Diana Vreeland and Andy Warhol for Edinburgh, as she did recently in "The Culture of Desire" at the New York Theatre Workshop. How about an Anne Bogart "take" on That Other Diana? Along with Camilla & Charles and Monica & Bill? And Linda & Lucienne. Or Liddy Dole Pineapple , Viagra, and Bob? Just thinking about future advances in cutting-edge avant-garde theatre. None of these ideas is under copyright protection.