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## Originality defines her 'Cabin'

BY CHRISTINE DOLEN

Anne Bogart's work arouses varied emotions. Excitement, a sense of intrigue, the thrill of something fresh, passionate recoiling at a piece that comes off as just too weird.

But boring? Never.

The brilliantly innovative director who founded the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (now called the SITI Company) in 1992, Bogart turns her incisive eye on the actor-audience relationship in *Cabin Pressure*, a piece originally developed for the acclaimed Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville. South Florida audiences can see it at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday thanks to the Miami Light Project, which is bringing it to Miami Beach's Colony Theater.

SITI is a movement-based company that combines a Bogart theory called Viewpoints (which creates structure for movement improvisation) and the Suzuki Method, a rigorous vocal, physical discipline developed by Japanese theater artist Tadashi Suzuki. As a result, SITI pieces meld movement, sound and dialogue to create theater unlike any other.

A 1996 piece, *Going, Going, Gone*, for example, left audiences both jazzed and baffled as they watched actors clearly going through the plot movements of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* while speaking dialogue drawn from a quantum physics text.

"So much of American theater is about you and me and our apartment and our problems," said Bogart from New York, where she heads the graduate directing program at Columbia University. "A great theater event does have a big streak of entertainment quality. It also has empathy, spectacle, ritual, participation and magic."

### 'IMAGINATIVE'

Humana Festival founder Jon Jory, who so believes in Bogart he once devoted a Modern Masters celebration to her work at Actors Theatre, described her gifts to the Louisville Courier Journal: "She is perhaps the most imaginative director now working in the American theater. In a theater where we've wrung every last drop from naturalism, Anne's work takes us into new territory. Objects and furniture find new use, space becomes a character and cliché a methodology for revelation. [Her work] is rife with visual composition. It's dance done by actors in the service of dramaturgy."

*Cabin Pressure* was developed during a six-month Actors Theatre residency. Bogart chose 57 audience members and had them watch the evolution of her production of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* and her own *Bob*, a homage to the

work of fellow innovator Robert Wilson. From interviews and the audience members' journals, and from work with the SITI Company, *Cabin Pressure* evolved.

The piece begins with the actors (company members Ellen Lauren, Kelly Maurer, Barney O'Hanlon, Stephen Webber and Will Bond) repeating the final scene of *Private Lives* over and over as the audience enters. It goes on to offer bits of a Restoration comedy, a murder mystery, Albee's beloved Virginia Woolf, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the actors-as-critics, the actors-as-audience.

Bogart's inspiration, she said, was the thought that "anyone in theater must be amazed at how different it is from one night to the next. I wondered what the actor was left with on a night-to-night basis, after the director and designers leave. What responsibility the audience brings."

The answers get to the very nature of theater.

"Great theater experiences have asked too much of me. But when I met the challenge as a human being, I was slightly altered," Bogart says. "We live so much in cyberspace now that going to the theater and breathing common air will be more and more unusual. Theater is an unmediated event between actor and audience."

Bogart, 48, tried working in a more traditional regional theater structure a decade ago during a season as artistic director of Rhode Island's Trinity Repertory Company. Her innovative work didn't translate into comfortable box-office revenue, and after board demands that she slash her budget by a quarter, she and Trinity parted company. She is far happier, she said, doing her theater her way with SITI.

"I'm not interested in the regional theater leadership model," she said with a laugh. "I have my own company now. We're modeled more on the Kronos Quartet or the Squirrel Nut Zippers."

*Christine Dolen is the Herald's theater critic.*