

On the road to nowhere

By IRENE BACKALENICK
Correspondent

To call this show at the Rich Forum a play is certainly stretching the definition. More accurately, it is a non-linear performance piece.

The promotional material refers to "bobrauschenbergamerica" as a "wild road trip through the American landscape" and writer Charles Mee claims it was inspired by the work of artist Robert Rauschenberg.

But the show is as confusing as its name. And one is hard put to see a Rauschenberg theme or a road trip theme — or any other theme, for that matter. Rather, it is a road to nowhere.

Despite extravagant promotional claims, the piece is a series of disconnected skits and images, (which of themselves are occasionally intriguing). At one point a woman (supposedly Rauschenberg's mother) speaks of her grandmother's ruby glass collection, which she had longed to smash against a brick wall.

That image of shattered glass is an apt metaphor for "bobrauschenbergamerica," with its fragmented scenes and disconnected characters.

The connection to Rauschenberg is tenuous at best, providing no insight into the artist's work or any similarity to his style.

If only this staged piece had been comparable to



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Theater review

PLAY:

"bobrauschenbergamerica," directed by Anne Bogart

THEATER: Stamford Center for the Arts, Rich Forum, 307 Atlantic St., Stamford

TIMES: Today-Sat. at 8 p.m.; Sun. at 2 p.m. Through Sun

TICKETS: \$20-\$45

BOX OFFICE: 325-4466

Rauschenberg's own fascinating collages, it might have worked. But here the disparate elements — the toy deer in a pink tutu, the ancient bath tub, the stuffed feathery hen wheeled about in a cart — never come together to create art. There is no focus, no unifying theme.

Despite the worthy efforts of director Anne Bogart to keep its many balls spinning in air, "bobrauschenberg" falls flat.

Yet it must be acknowledged that the piece has its good moments and its appealing performances. Particularly noteworthy is Kelly Maurer, who plays Bob's

Road trip: At left is a scene from "bobrauschenbergamerica," which is playing at the Rich Forum in Stamford through Sunday.

mother in apron and housedress, like a scene out of "Our Town."

She manages to evoke a long-gone heart-of-America world of homespun virtues and simple pleasures. If there is any unifying force, it is Maurer, who reminisces about the artist's childhood throughout the show.

Ellen Lauren, too, is a joy to watch. Her opening gambit, in which she rejects one lover and suddenly takes on another, more than compensates for the show's shortcomings. Every scene with Lauren has a sparkling, sharp-edged quality.

And individual scenes can be unexpectedly comic. A goofy-looking guy in a shower cap, horn-rimmed glasses and towel, for example, scrubs and showers himself to the tune of "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire." And in another intriguing scene, a trucker and his girl friend wallow in a sea of martinis.

But "bobrauschenbergamerica" falls short of its pretensions.

This trip across America leads to a dead end.