

WMNR

Fine Arts Radio

ROSALIND FRIEDMAN
THEATER CRICUIT

bobrauschenbergamerica
SCA/Rich Forum

R. PHENEGER
203-358-2313

Broadcast: 9/23-9/29 3min.

Bob's Mom, a sweet-faced mother with apron in tact, played with convincing charm by Kelly Maurer, enters the stage through a screen door. She points to large photographs overhead presumably of famed collagist Bob Rauschenberg as a child, and she concludes her talk by saying: Art was not part of our lives. Then all hell breaks loose. A homeless man emerges (J.Ed Araiza) from a huge carton; a young girl (Jennifer Tauber) roller blades back and forth across the stage; a loving couple fights and separates, as the fiancée, Susan (Ellen Lauren), passionately attacks the homeless man, driving him to the ground with her kisses.

Exhilarating, enigmatic, and engaging. Those are the words that best describe Charles L. Mee's play, bobrauschenbergamerica, which incorporates in no logical order vibrant color and music, exuberant dancing, Choreographed and performed with joyous spirit by Barney O'Hanlon and company, chicken jokes, the philosophy of love and mirrors delivered by a Domino Pizza boy (Gian-Murray Gianino), a bagpiper in full dress, the beauty and grimness of Los Alamos and the wonders of science. Homey as apple pie at a picnic and as cleverly funny as the Martini, swimmingly mixed by bikini-clad Akiko Aizawa as Phil's Girl and Leon Pauli as Phil, the Trucker, it certainly, but for a few scenes, (Destroying a large can could be eliminated) captures Americana, as a perception. A sort of Our Town, gone berserk, it is best realized in the Tag Sale, where the entire cast swaps articles until even the ironing board on which the articles are displayed is taken.

Playing only through September 29 at the Rich Forum/Stamford Center of the Arts, this kaleidoscopic work represents a non-linear theatrical experience. Much as modern artists like Picasso and Kadinsky broke up traditional images and reinvented them on canvas, this playwright presents the story of America, as if seen through the eyes of Bob Rauschenberg, who it is said here "can see beauty in almost everything." First presented at the 2001 Humana Festival, it is directed by Anne Bogart, Artistic Director of the SITI Company, an international theater company based in New York City, which she founded with Tadashi Suzuki in 1992.

On James Schuette's eclectic set with walls full of cut outs, reminiscent of the TV show "Laugh-In," and the stage littered with, among other things, life-like roosters, a deer in a pink tutu, and a bathtub, the excellent cast, costumed by Mr. Schuette, rollicks and frolics, creating what appears to be a free-for-all. In truth, the message comes over loud and clear. Art is freedom of the imagination. Art lets us practice freedom and strengthens America and its citizenry. Art is what makes us unique. As we felt when we saw Charles Mee's Big Love at Long Wharf, to see bobrauschenbergamerica, which runs only through September 29 at the Rich Forum/Stamford Center for the Arts, is to experience a different form of communication. In fact, Long Wharf opens its season with another of his plays, Wintertime. ###