

## STAGE REVIEW

## The Medium's The Message

*City Theatre opens its fall season with a stunning drama.*

By Jeffrey DeVincent

Ensuring another season of visionary drama, City Theatre's first production, *The Medium* by Anne Bogart, is a triumph. *The Medium* secures City Theatre as Pittsburgh's foremost haven for high quality, contemporary theater.

Bogart's richly textured adaptation of the life works of media philosopher and/or prophet Marshall McLuhan is simply captivating. A movement piece of astute creativity, *The Medium* is an inspired journey into real emotion by means of brilliantly etched, surreal concepts.

Bogart, in her director's notes, describes a need to explore the survival of entertainment in "a world where the very nature of entertainment is constantly being redefined." With this in mind, she set out to direct a piece that would do just that, as well as delve into McLuhan's writings and critiques.

Bogart's direction is teeming with life, spirit and meticulous clarity. Creating a constant flow of bodies and line, Bogart conjures an evening of stupefying theater that set my senses dancing. This is a virtually seamless theatrical event that must be experienced by the Pittsburgh theater-going community.

Utilizing astonishing movement, scored from the Suzuki technique, five actors (J. Ed Araiza, Will Bond, Ellen Lauren, Kelly Maurer and Stephen Webber) dance their way into your imagination by means of the utmost specificity and grace. This is an amazing ensemble comprised of mind-boggling discipline and talent.

Araiza is an effortless character actor who manages somehow to appear radically different each time he enters the stage. The most intriguing of his gifts, however, is his ability to use what he is given by his fellow actors. He relishes every moment he is on the stage.

Bond's work is gorgeously fluid and energized with an astonishing amount of vigor and physical commitment. So engrossed was he in his character, he eventually forgot he was performing.

Lauren's appeal is most resonant during her moments of quiet melancholy and sincere honesty. She is a striking, physical performer thorough in spirit and dance.

Maurer is largely responsible for the more overtly comic beats of the piece's orchestration. She is a well-timed, wholly committed

performer who attains levels of theatrical play. She was the evening's standout.

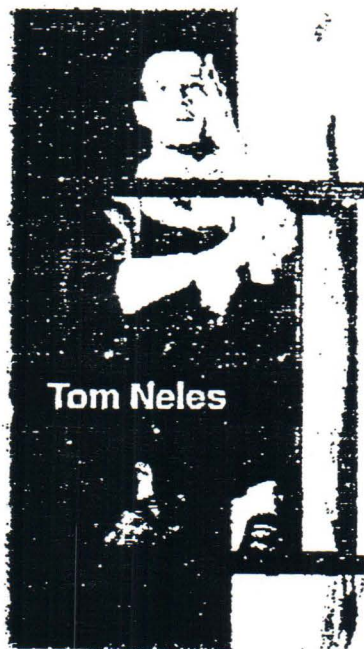
Large and encompassing is the presence of Webber within this eclectic work. He is a gifted and crafty performer whose physical embodiment of three-dimensional characters is among the best that I've ever seen on the Pittsburgh stage.

Another start of the evening is the production's thought-provoking soundtrack, designed by Darron L. West. The soundscape imbues further momentum to Bogart's already rapid direction, resulting in a fulfilling montage of all the

stunning theatrical elements.

The production is 95 minutes long without an intermission. I never once craved a break or the ending, as I often do. I wanted to remain in my seat with my mouth hanging open, intrigued and enamored with this work. *The Medium* opens the 1996-97 season at City Theatre, South Side, from Wed., Oct. 23 through Sun., Oct. 27; Tue., Oct. 27 through Thu., Oct. 31, and Fri., Nov. 1 through Sun., Nov. 3. Performances are at 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. 431-CITY.

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Tom Neles