

Outstanding cast looms large in Anne Bogart's 'The Medium'

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Q: What is purple and hums?

A: An electric grape.

Q: Why does it hum?

A: Because it doesn't know the words.

Director-choreographer Anne Bogart knows the words and jokes of Marshall McLuhan, but she doesn't let them constrict her avant-garde vision. In *The Medium*, the movement is the message.

Like Bogart's other pieces at the Humana Festival and elsewhere, this 90-minute collage of McLuhan's ideas and recycled TV shows hums and crackles with sculptural energy, wit and whimsy.

J. Ed Araiza, Will Bond, Ellen Lauren, Kelly Maurer and Stephen Webber play chameleonic, often comical multiple roles with acrobatic precision: McLuhan, who speaks and steps haltingly because of a stroke; a telethon host a la Jerry Lewis; a televangelist; two talk-show chatterboxes; and a vaudeville team, with the man as ventriloquist and a giggly blonde as the dummy.

The terrific cast juggles the words and movements with parodic dexterity in Gabriel Berry's television-nostalgic costumes, under Michitomo Shiohara's crisp lighting and on Anita Stewart's luminously abstract set. Best of all: Darron West's "soundscape," which blends eerie whistles and bells, a deep throbbing bass and samples from *Body Heat*, Enya and an old Dionne Warwick song.

Bogart may be a frustrated filmmaker. Her style is the jump-cut — not only between scenes but within closeups. Her signature shot is the slow

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■ The Wexner Center for the Arts will present *The Medium* at 8 tonight and Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday in the Wexner Performance Space, W. 15th Avenue at N. High Street. Tickets cost \$14, or \$10.50 for Wexner Center members. Call 292-3535 or 431-3600.

pan, with dreamlike bodies gliding across the stage — sleepwalkers in McLuhan's global village.

Bogart believes in the aesthetics of sampling and words as incantations. "You can't go home again." Click. "The way to keep up is to be ahead." Click. "Numb. Numb. Numb." Click. "Wake up!" Click. "Are we having fun yet?" It takes time to feel the cybernetic rhythm, but yes: It's fun.

The target audience is not couch potatoes, but those who look down on couch potatoes. Just don't expect the images and movements to add up easily.

Although *The Medium* resembles Arthur Kopit's *Wings*, which also built a fantasy landscape around a stroke victim, Bogart is more interested in the futurist's ideas than the man's predicament.

The Medium is the next-to-last entry (before actor-playwright Kevin Kling) in one of the most intriguing events of the season: the Wexner's "Theatrical Impulse: New Theater Directions" series. So turn off the TV set, tune in Bogart and drop by the Wexner Center to sample one of the weirdest, loveliest works of avant-garde theater.