

From Toga to Saratoga

By Porter Anderson

HOUSTON—A little jet lag can put a flush on any idea. But Anne Bogart is hardly off the plane from Japan—"I never can figure out why I'm so much more lagged coming this way than going there"—and she's clearly flying high on the heady possibilities of her new venture.

"We could sit for months or years trying to find out what we're doing," she says, "or we could start by making art." So her Saratoga International Theater Institute will do the latter, making its debut in two September weekends of performances at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center and Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs. Bogart has staged Charles L. Mee Jr.'s *Orestes*, based on Euripides. And Tadashi Suzuki offers an English-speaking treatment of his longtime work on *The Bacchae* in a piece called *Dionysus*.

While both shows are performed by members of a 25-artist Japanese and American ensemble, Bogart and Suzuki have embarked on an effort surely Greek in scope: They're looking to develop a way of working intended to do no less than "revitalize theater from the inside out," in Bogart's words.

Hogarthian of visage but a modern romantic at heart, Bogart has issued a manifesto with Suzuki on the new program. "The point has been reached," this credo reads, "when new and better ideas concerning the future of the art form are desperately needed.



Anne Bogart: revitalizing theater from inside out

... We need a place which will develop the artist for the theater of today and ensure that development into the next century."

That "place," in fact, will ideally be four places. Bogart envisions "a kind of circuit including Toga," where Suzuki is based in Japan. "It's a beautiful, mountainous place to work. Saratoga is home. Houston [the Alley Theatre, to be specific] would like to sponsor us. And we're looking for maybe one more place."

It's no surprise that they're also looking for money. The project currently is budgeted at some \$250,000 and has been supported through in-kind donations from

All Nippon Airways for transportation and Skidmore College for lodging at its mansion, Wilson House. While not yet ready to establish an endowment fund, Bogart says she is hoping to attract foundation interest.

Such funding sources are particularly critical to the institute because Bogart plans to have no board of directors, per se, but a "steering committee of well-known artists from around the world." And here you glimpse, even before the first performance, a part of Bogart's unique dream. "There are several huge directions we have to embrace and go forward in," she says. "One is that

this institute will work in different cultural backgrounds. Another is that it's going to value the actor above everything else. Compensating actors well for their work is high priority. This is theater against movable sets and objects."

The uneasy shudder you may sense running through Bogart's regional-theater cohorts at those words is their recognition of Anne's Complaint. In recent seasons—as she went into and out of the artistic directorship of Trinity Rep, as she staged Mee's *Another Person Is a Foreign Country* for Anne Hamburger, Brecht's *In the Jungle of the Cities* for JoAnne Akalaitis and Mabou Mines, Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz* for Tanya Berezin, and her own and Tina Landau's *American Vaudeville* for Gregory Boyd at the Alley—Bogart has become increasingly and bravely articulate about professional American theaters that may have sold out to the box office to survive. "A lot of them are being run by their marketing directors," she says. And a lot of those marketing directors, you can bet, aren't happy to hear the president of Theatre Communications Group questioning the good faith of the fold.

Bogart's not slowed by their qualms. "You'd think these theaters around our country were built around the huge, expansive dreams of artists," she says, "artists who hired good managers. Unfortunately those good managers did what they do well, which is make good institutions—which all but threw the artists out. We're making an institution created out of the work, out of the art. We're trying to find an alternative to the administration-heavy ways that institutions are set up nowadays.

At Suzuki's operation in Toga, everything—the architecture, the structure of schedules, all of it—is built around rehearsal. The decisions are made around the work."

By this point, jet lag or no, the warm rumble of enthusiasm her colleagues must surely love has taken hold of Bogart's voice. She has seen what she wants in the way of a format in which to make her art. Through the Saratoga Institute, she can expand and color her frequent explorations of peculiarly American performance expression by reaching for internationalism.

"The global village is truly happening," her manifesto reads. "We need to reflect this culturally, in the way our art is produced, whom it addresses, and what it's about." Part of what that's about is Suzuki's singular form of physically characterized dramaturgy. His work on *The Bacchae*, Bogart says, has gone on for a dozen years, the *Dionysus* being a brand-new manifestation. Only two actors she brought to the project hadn't worked with him before. The others, she says, exhibited a special trademark of Suzuki doctrine: "They're rooted, they don't shuffle. I love that."

Her own directorial contribution, Mee's *Orestes*, has had two previous stagings, one by Landau and one by Robert Woodruff. Together, she and Suzuki know no language barriers to their shared goals. "Our forte," she says, "is making work based on values and our philosophies in art."

Will the Suzuki-Bogart collaborative be the basis for the Saratoga project in the long term, or just for this opening program?

"Suzuki jokes with me," Bogart replies with a laugh, "saying, 'I'm good for five years.' But we both agree it can't be just a Japanese-American thing. We want people involved from all over the world. What we're doing now is starting. I'm initiating, he's responding. But our intention is not just him or me."