

Direct approach

ANNE BOGART is lecturing in Edinburgh tonight. The title of her talk is "Six Things I Know For Certain About Directing For the Theatre". Only six?

For the American director – and before you ask she is no relation to Humphrey – knows a great deal more than half a dozen things about her chosen profession, as anyone who saw the thrilling work she brought to the Edinburgh International Festival last year will testify.

Her productions, *Cabin Pressure*, a play about the nature of theatre, and *War of the Worlds*, a meditation on the life of Orson Welles, received mixed reviews. But, as American critic Mel Gussow has pointed out, it depends on your point of view whether you see her as an innovator or a provocateur assaulting a script.

The work 50-year-old Bogart does with her nine-year-old, New York-based SITI company (Saratoga International Theatre Institute) is invariably an exploration of her nation's past and of American culture. With her ensemble, she has made plays about vaudeville, the 1930s phenomenon of marathon dancing, silent movies, musicals and jazz. There has also been a series of works devoted to American artists such as the one-man play *Bob*, about imagist theatre-maker Robert Wilson.

In *War of the Worlds*, Welles – sonorous-voiced actor Stephen Webber – asks an audience "to become a child again, to see with the eyes of a child". And this is exactly what Bogart and her company ask of us in their work. Invited to close our eyes in the theatre, we don't – Bogart does it for us.

The daughter of a navy family, she formed the SITI company with distinguished Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki to emphasise international cultural exchange and collaboration. It was originally planned as a summer institute in Saratoga

Springs, but it quickly became a year-round, award-winning company that has revitalised American theatre.

Training is intensive in Suzuki's methods (although his involvement in the company is now less hands-on) and Bogart's own approach, called Viewpoints, which she laughingly describes as being stolen from modern dance. The result is incredibly physical, text-based theatre and she is now recognised as one of America's most avant-garde and gifted directors. SITI also has an impressive teaching and touring programme.

She wants to create theatre that is "full of terror, beauty, love and belief in the innate human potential for change", she says. Truly an ensemble-based company, it is made up of ten actors, four designers, a production manager, stage manager and general manager.

This small, deeply committed troupe has staged a *Miss Julie* in which Bogart put the sexually confused Strindberg into a boxing ring, and *Culture of Desire*, based on Dante's *Inferno*, in which pop artist Andy Warhol gazed into the mirror of American consumerism. This haunting piece featured fur coats, lacy underwear, circus music and Popeye and Shirley Temple tap dancing.

For Bogart, tonight's lecture will be another shared experience. Such events are the stuff of her theatrical life. It is important for her that the poetry of the human spirit is shared.

"I am interested in asking what is the creative role of the audience. What is their job? There is such a misunderstanding of what theatre is for audiences, because of film. Don't get me wrong. I love to go to the movies, but when I do I sit back and I eat popcorn. I just take things in. In the theatre, it's the opposite."

Anne Bogart's lecture is at the Hub, Edinburgh, at 7.30pm tonight



War of the Worlds came to last year's Edinburgh Festival