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ARTS & FILMS

Lenox 'Between Wind' a bracing piece of theater

BETWEEN WIND - Music-theater piece conceived and directed by Anne Bogart. Music by Seth Cooper. Text by Jessica Litwak. Set by Sarah Bonnemaison. Costumes by Jim Buff. Lighting by Carol Mullins. Additional text by Anthony Gerber. At Music Theater Group/Lenox Arts Center, Stockbridge, through July 26.

By John Engstrom
Special to the Globe

STOCKBRIDGE - More of a piece of somber chamber music, or an austere visual poem, than a conventional narrative drama, "Between Wind" offers the first really bracing theatergoing experience of the summer. Billed as a work in progress in its premiere performances at the Lenox Arts Center, it already has much

going for it. There is fine ensemble acting by a cast of six, including two children; evocative music by Seth Cooper and lighting by Carol Mullins; sharp staging by Anne Bogart, who also conceived the piece; and, most of all, a theme of grave import, namely holocausts, both private and universal.

But it must be said at the outset that the theme is not developed discursively; rather, it comes slowly into focus in elliptical flashes, through a series of terse, concentrated scenes that register like episodes in a film, elegantly lit and posed. First there is an overture of quick, silent tableaux in which the characters and their situations are introduced. It ends when, rather devastatingly, they peel off their "skin" - the identical brown jumpsuits they all have been wearing - and stand in the nondescript, vaguely '40s cos-

tumes they will wear throughout the piece.

They are a diverse lot, spanning the generations, with two contrasting sets of parents and children: one a gentle research scientist worried about the future of his small son, the other a disturbed victim of Hiroshima whose family and home were destroyed, who is in search of his little daughter. The daughter, it turns out, is studying violin with one of the other characters, an operatic soprano who catastrophically lost her voice just as she was about to sing the role of Bellini's "Norma." The sixth character, the scientist's wife, who repeatedly waxes nostalgic about past family events, is well-played by an older woman, but her part is one of the fuzzier elements of the show.

There is nothing fuzzy, howev-

er, about Bogart's choreographic direction. Cool and formal as a Japanese garden, it allows the actors to breathe, to exist comfortably as the characters. If the text occasionally seems opaque, that's because in this production words are an equal partner with gesture and music. It is a consistently beautiful show to watch: Gold, then rose light plays on the faces of the actors; their space is bounded by screens of white fabric occasionally hoisted to reveal a tableaux against gold paper. Behind the screens, off to the right, under a canopy that suggests an origami formation, sit the four musicians, who provide a delicate palette of tone-painting on marimba, French horn, flute and a keening human voice - an aural emblem of the loss and disconnection that is the universal lot of the characters.