

Bob

SITI Company at New York Live Arts

Reviewed by Jason Fitzgerald
JANUARY 22, 2012



Photo by Shehab Hossain

"I want to be the King of Spain!" shouts Will Bond, repeating an anecdote about Robert Wilson's childhood. Dressed like a mime without makeup, in perfectly ironed tuxedo pants and coat and slicked hair, Bond spends the entire 90 minutes of "Bob" delivering the great avant-garde director's occasionally pompous, sometimes poignant aphorisms, collected from decades of writings and interviews. Conceived and directed by Anne Bogart, with text adapted by Jocelyn Clark,

"Bob" was first presented in 1998, when it won two Obie Awards. Its revival is a chance to encounter Bogart and Bond at their creative best, weaving tribute into stylistic imitation into theatrical magic show with a grace and discipline that suggests Marlene Dietrich (who, we learn, is Wilson's favorite chanteuse).

Bond doesn't impersonate Wilson. He delivers his lines with the gleeful, sometimes cackling tenor of a town crier, throwing the director's playfully self-admiring public persona back in his audience's faces. Even the most serious, committed fan of "Einstein on the Beach" might admit what a guilty pleasure it is to commune with Wilson's unmitigated ego. But Bond also reveals himself Wilson's best pupil, delivering a balletic choreography of slow, fluid posturing disconnected from the thread of his narrative. He never relaxes, poised for a leap that he never takes. Instead, in a spare space walled in by rows of lights, he turns a chair and a glass of milk into dancing partners and paints scene pictures with his shadow.

Far more than a Wilson lecture or pastiche, "Bob" is a reckoning with his art and his reputation. Wilson is known for frustrating and sometimes overlooking the needs of his audience, and the laughter "Bob" produces can feel a bit like his fans' revenge. Removed from the bromidic accolades that have accompanied this visionary artist for the last 30 years, audiences of "Bob" are allowed to contend with his fame in conjunction with the testament of an unparalleled life's work. In a strange way,

"Bob" belongs less in SITI Company's repertoire than in Wilson's, as a jester might belong in a king's court, to keep him human.

Presented by SITI Company at New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St., NYC. Jan. 19-29. Tue.-Sat., 7:30 p.m.; Sun., 2:30 p.m. (212) 924-0077 or www.newyorklivearts.org.

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