



# Bogart in DC

by Deryl Davis

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If the name conjures images of a certain craggy-faced actor with puppy dog eyes and a cigarette dangling from his lower lip, think again. This is Bogart as in ANNE, and she's one of the most creative and compelling directors in American theater today. Washington audiences will get a taste of the Obie-winner's signature style when Anne Bogart comes to Arena Stage to direct *Intimations for Saxophone* in January 2005.

Well-known in the professional theater world and in theater conservatories, Bogart's movement and gesture-based approach, known as Viewpoints, may be less familiar to mainstream audiences attuned to the predominant realism of the American stage. *Intimations* will be Bogart's first premiere in the Washington area.

"Her work is completely new to DC and to Washington audiences," says Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith. "It's a visual style, as opposed to a psychological style, as opposed to the kind of realism DC theatergoers are used to seeing."

Smith has known Bogart since 1984, when she invited the New York-based director to lead a workshop at the Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska, where Smith was then Artistic Director. The two have remained close since that time, and Smith says she's been looking for the right project for which to bring Bogart to Arena Stage. When

Arena's former Senior Dramaturg Michael Kinghorn discovered *Intimations*, a long-lost play by Jazz Age playwright Sophie Treadwell, Smith knew she'd found what she was looking for.

"It's a very rare kind of expressionistic play," Smith says, "and it demands an artist who is highly visual and auditory. The first person I thought of was Anne, because her work is particularly well-suited to this kind of drama."

For her part, Bogart needed little convincing to come to Washington to direct a play about a woman's sexual awakening set amid the fever and experimentation of the Roaring Twenties.

"I was born to do this play," Bogart says. "It has the things I love – the Jazz Age, the Expressionist artistic setting, and the connection with social and philosophical movements of the time." She adds that "it's really different from the naturalism you find in most American drama – more adventurous and on a larger scale. That spirit is very familiar to me."

Written in the early part of the twentieth century, *Intimations for Saxophone* follows heroine Lily Laird as she struggles to escape a loveless marriage and discover her own identity amid the sweeping societal changes of the 1920s. Bogart says the Arena production, a world premiere of the long neglected play, will feature a "wide sweep of fantastic movement"

Bogart's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

illustrating Lily's journey through that explosive period. Audiences can expect to see Bogart's signature in the highly physical acting style, the almost choreographed movement, and the use of out-sized gestures.

"It's really a study in iconic language, in the power of symbols," says Washington actress Susan Lynskey, who studied with Bogart a few years back and will be part of the *Intimations for Saxophone* cast. "You realize that one person's movement in space can influence everyone else. It's a very collaborative process – you never forget that you are part of a whole."

Lynskey credits the Bogart method with making her a more responsive actor and a better ensemble player, which she counts as an important strength. "You recognize the connection between things," she says. "That empowers you and enables you to reach a

deeper level of physical and emotional awareness."

At the time of this writing, Lynskey had not been assigned a specific role in *Intimations*, which she says is not atypical of Bogart's approach. Often, the director will work collaboratively with a group of actors before roles are assigned; sometimes roles and even character genders switch during this process.

Bogart is the first to admit her dramatic style clashes with that of many American theaters, which tend to focus squarely on realism. For her, the important difference is between description and expression. Realism, in Bogart's view, aims to recreate a situation; expressionism aims to convey the feeling of it. The director likens her approach to Vaudeville (another major interest) in the way that it combines elements of dance, music, and theater to

create what she refers to as a "magnified human presence." In a typical Bogart production, ordinary movements can take on added meaning simply by becoming larger and slower.

"In American theater, we try to keep things very real, but very small," says Rick Davis, artistic director of George Mason University's Center for the Arts in Fairfax, Virginia. "Anne's work is bigger and more external. She uses bodies in space in ways that aren't literal, but which are true in the emotional life of the character."

Davis, who has attended one of Bogart's theater workshops, says his own directorial style is very different from hers, but he has great respect for what she's trying to accomplish. "Her style is very appealing, creating something that is emotionally grounded while stylistically abstract," Davis says. "It's

a refreshing difference, even if you don't specifically use all of her techniques."

Students at George Mason study Bogart's philosophy, especially her book *A Director Prepares*, in a number of directing classes. Davis notes that Bogart's influence is probably growing in college theater departments, but her approach may never be considered mainstream. Nonetheless, it stretches the boundaries of what theater is and can be, and that alone draws audiences. In March 2005, Bogart's company, called SITI after the Saratoga International Theater Institute where it began, will perform a new work titled *Death and the Plowman* at GMU's Center for the Arts. Their first appearance at the Center last year, in a production of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds*, drew a packed house and, according to Davis, did not disappoint those who came expecting a

Bogart's production of *bobrauschenbergamerica*.



Bogart's production of *systems/layers*.

more traditional radio play.

Members of SITI also will be involved in *Intimations for Saxophone* at Arena. They will bring with them the rigorous physical training that SITI is known for – the Viewpoints approach derived from post-modern dance and the Suzuki Method of traditional theater and martial arts movement techniques developed by Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki, with whom Bogart co-founded SITI in 1992. The influence of traditional Japanese theater can be found in much of SITI's work and remains an important part of the gesture and movement vocabulary Bogart employs in each new production.

Despite these influences, Bogart says her main thematic interests are the exploration of American culture and the American psyche. That, she says, makes the discovery of a long-lost work by the author of *Machinal* (a dark, psychological

drama which became a staple of American theater after its rediscovery in the 1980s) all the more exciting. "This premiere is a very big deal in American theater," Bogart asserts. "Personally, I think *Intimations* is better than *Machinal*. People just need to see it."

Molly Smith agrees that *Intimations* deserves a place in the American theater canon beside its famous cousin. She says these lost American classics often were never produced because audiences were not ready for them at the time. After lying undiscovered in the Library of Congress for decades, it may finally have the champion it needs to get a proper hearing.

"Anne is fearless," Smith says, "going in [theatrical] directions other people don't. I can't wait to see what she does with this."

*Intimations for Saxophone*, at Arena Stage, Jan. 21 - Feb. 27. ■