

# A Lively Celebration of the Power of No! No!

The New York Times, 16 April 2010, Roslyn Sulcas

“No. More. Dancing.”

Thus begins a list of prohibitions that Ms. Kujawska, egged on by the mousy but aggressive Aurora Lubos, presents to the audience with mounting hysteria. “No more classical music, especially Bach. No more partner work. No more beautiful poetics. Nothing original. Nothing acoustic. Nothing that comes from deep inside. No more sexual politics. No more rhythms, no more internal rhythms. No to glamour, no to success. No more talking!”

It’s a post-postmodern riff on Yvonne Rainer’s 1965 “No Manifesto,” a reaction, now celebrated, to the polished spectacles of mythic grandeur from Martha Graham and others that dominated dance at the time. “No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe,” it begins.

But manifestos are pure idealism, and in Ms. Vincent’s thought-provoking, sometimes-tedious, sometimes-profound deconstruction of the making and performing of a dance piece, there is only messy reality and disappointment. (I’ve never worked with anyone I admire,” Ms. Lubos wails. “Meredith Monk. Yoko Ono. Pina Bausch. Marina Abramovic!”)

Or rather, unreality, since as hard as the dancers work to show us what is apparently the unvarnished truth of creation (“What are we going to do if we don’t do any of those things?” “These steps feel wrong”), they are also part of a carefully structured, rigorously choreographed piece in which almost every one of the opening statements is inevitably disobeyed.

Ms. Vincent sustains that tension with high-wire dexterity in *If We Go On*, which her seven-member company, the Vincent Dance Theater of Sheffield, England, opened at the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University on Thursday night.

Ms. Kujawska, who also plays the violin (Bach!) during the piece, offers us a thread of narrative for the work in continued monologues that keep asking, what to do next? Scott Smith provides a parallel text about experiencing performance as life-enhancing, then takes it to absurd extremes. (“Even when they are homeless, they remember her and say if she could go on, we can too.”) Alternately he fills us in on the work’s structure. (“Now there will be a short pause.”) Between the text (by Wendy Houstoun) slip little jerky, electrical impulses of dance and brief musical passages, played by the cellist Alex Catona or Ms. Kujawska, with occasional electronic additions. It’s mostly compelling, although the pacing isn’t perfect, and Mr. Smith’s monologues eventually feel overdone.

And the unrelenting focus on the misery of trying to create and perform doesn’t ring entirely true; after all, most performers presumably like being onstage.

But Ms. Vincent does an astonishing sleight-of-hand job of simultaneously offering us the bare bones of creation — steps, music, speech, lighting — in all their bareness, and then pulling the wool over our eyes as every artist must do.

“Have we even made a show at all?” Ms. Kujawska cries despairingly in a litany of self-criticism toward the end. Oh yes, Ms. Vincent has made a show. And she knows it perfectly well.