

If We Go On

The Stage, 26 October 2009, Richard Edmonds

Charlotte Vincent's fascinating performance piece is not for the faint-hearted. In a work as far-out as this, it is useful to view it as a piece of latter-day nihilism in the manner of Dadaism or the futurists.

Performers stroll on and off the playing area in the kind of clothes you'd wear to clean the car. They talk to us in fragmented language, tearing up sheets of printed paper in the process, until the shabby stage looks like a tip. But clearly tip is 'in', so to speak.

A large metal sheet up stage doubles as both scribble board and percussion device, where a dancer's sudden heel kick can wake you up quite sharply.

Long spiels provide some sort of reflection on the human condition (why are we here, why are we doing this?) thus evoking anything from the sense of hopelessness found in *The Waste Land* or *Waiting For Godot*, to the anti-establishment diktats of FT Marinetti, the high priest of futurism, who noted in 1917: "Futurist dance will be anti-harmonic, ill-mannered, free-wordist, synthetic".

Yet how splendid it is to see a piece which can shrug off so casually the structures of much modern dance. Gone are the sleek bodies, the breaks, immaculate couplings and bravura solos, the leotards and choreography.

Instead, these honest and intensely committed young men and women work around and under a dozen (cruelly cold) dangling spotlight bulbs questioning the nature of silence, or even the pause in both art and life. Speaking and moving, they take issue with certainty, questioning its validity and its place in life's ultimate truths.

Using the philosophical concept of enigma in a dozen different ways, they find a clever meshing structure in the ambivalent background themes of Alex Catona's accomplished cello

playing which, depending on the particular shape of a section, amplifies the sense of melancholy or, conversely, the carnivalesque reflected in today's shapeless world.

This is serious theatre which provides a sharp and poignant antidote to much of today's mindless showbiz top-flash. I congratulate Malvern Theatres for endorsing its qualities and by welcoming these gifted players into such a sympathetic playing space.