

Dance If We Go On

Touring

★★★★☆

Donald Hutera

What a lot of problems the seven brave performers in Vincent Dance Theatre's latest production must endure. They are all, in the word of a cast member, afflicted with "second-hand steps and third-rate thoughts". It gets worse. "We don't know if we even made a show at all," another laments.

On the contrary, they and the choreographer Charlotte Vincent have assembled what is, at times, a strong show. Working primarily from a text by Wendy Houston that mixes cynical moaning and navel-gazing nihilism to often humorous effect, Vincent's dancers and musicians pose questions relating, on the surface, to creative despair. On a more crucial, metaphorical, level the show is about the difficulties we encounter when ascribing meaning to our lives.

Lasting about 80 minutes, *If We Go On* is touring Britain until the end of November. It starts out with a recitation of negatives that riff on the choreographer Yvonne Rainer's infamous "No" manifesto from the mid-1960s. "No more dancing," declares Patrycja Kujawska, spurred on by the mouse-like yet militant Aurora Lubos. "No more seduction, no more success." The two women are an amusing double-act until Kujawska starts screaming into a microphone, backed by a punk rock instrumental.

There's more shouting later, and deeply unappealing it is too. "This is really me," Kujawska brays, undermining any observations being made about the thin line between reality and theatrical artifice. But you do wonder what Vincent and company are so angry about. At the same time it feels as if the Pirandellian conceits could have been pushed further. And wouldn't a greater acknowledgment of the pleasures of performance have expanded the piece's mock-miserable premise?

This abrasive performance has a bit of song and some brief, edgy dance, plus a few, blessed moments of stillness. At its best it tries to dig at psychological states that few other dances do.

**Patrick Centre, Birmingham, tonight;
The Place, London, WC2, Fri, Sat**