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Learning To Say NO

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At the beginning of Vincent Dance Theatre's North American Premiere of *If We Go On*, presented at the Alexander Kasser Theater April 15, 17, and 18th, Vincent Dance Theatre referenced Yvonne Rainer's "No Manifesto." Rainer's "No Manifesto" calls upon negating or stripping things down, just doing in a very minimalist fashion. Yvonne Rainer's iconic TRIO A is one example of this minimal approach to choreography.

Rainer utilized everyday movements in her choreography. In the "No Manifesto," she writes: "NO to spectacle, no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe." The dancing in "TRIO A" comes across less like *Swan Lake*, and more along the lines of a task, as though Rainer could turn at any moment to operate an article of heavy machinery, or change a tire. As a result, Rainer's choreography suggests that art-making itself could be like any other everyday activity, as opposed to a behavior of the supernatural.

If We Go On contains this element of the everyday, too. The performer's dialogue is plain-spoken, leading to odd pauses, complete silence. The actors' onstage personas seemed very much like everyday people who question things, take things to far, make mistakes, learn to do things together. It was as though everyone from VDT had gotten together to tell us something. In fact, the first impulse of *If We Go On* seems to spring from the moment in which Charlotte Vincent had perhaps already given up, and decided NOT to go on.

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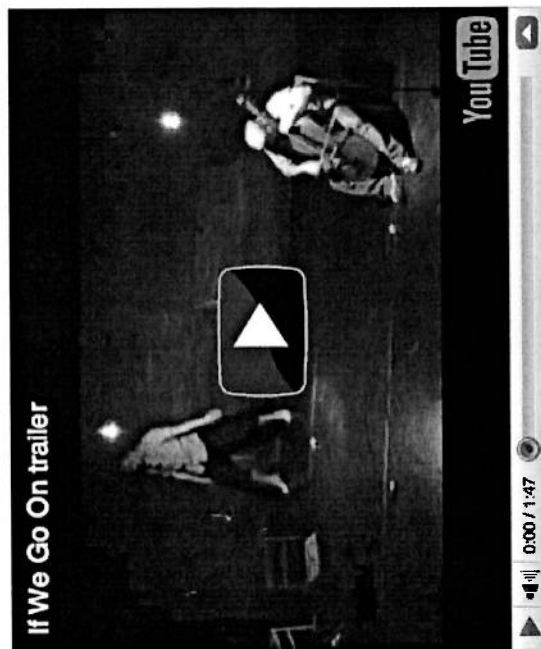
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At first glance, "dance-theater" seems anything but minimal — incorporating dance, theater, and live music-making.

What's so minimal about that?

In fact, if anything, the form of VDT certainly seems complicated: all of those performers on stage... all of those "different" art forms to bring together. But Charlotte Vincent is investigating a form at its roots, forcing artists from "different" disciplines into a dialogue with one another. For example, call and response at the beginning of *If We Go On* brings a cellist and dancer into conversation with one another, in a manner that demonstrates, on a one-to-one scale, shared language:



Onstage, Vincent Dance Theatre isn't as stripped down, minimal in its motion, as "TRIO A." But *If We Go On* poses the possibility of a "NO" to dance, and what saying no really means for dance: an openness to other forms through everyday, "undancelike" movements. And though VDT's pieces at Peak Performances last month, *If We Go On* and *Broken Chords*, have to do with endings, her work's fascination with formlessness is a beginning. In the un-hierarchical, delirious everyday that's present in Charlotte Vincent's work, is a potential for movement inside of all of us. Forget the costumes, the dance classes, the divine intervention. Half of saying "NO" is saying "YES."

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