

# Vandekeybus stages latest uh . . . work

By Mike Steele / Staff Writer

Don't call Wim Vandekeybus a choreographer, please. Call him unconventional, *sui generis*, a guy who breathes in his own performance ether. The term "choreographer," he pleads, is too limiting, and he doesn't like limitations.

Vandekeybus is 28 and has created only four dances — oops, sorry, call them works — so far. Before he created his first one at age 23, he had been a farmer, an equestrian, a member of the Belgian national acrobatics team, a student of psychology and a photographer — never a dancer. His stage experience was limited to working in one theater piece with the Flemish avant-garde director Jan Fabre. That's all it took.

Vandekeybus (Vann-da-KAY-boos) suddenly had things to say about how the body moves and the way it communicates, so he pulled together some performers and began convincing the directors of four different arts festivals that they wanted to see what he wanted to show (even though it was only an inkling in his mind at the time). They jointly commissioned his first work, "What the Body Does Not Remember." It hit all four festivals like a whirlwind and ultimately ended up in New York, where it won a Bessie Award, the first of two Vandekeybus has won. (The Bessies are given for dance, performance art and unconventional theater.)

Whatever you call what Vandekeybus makes, it does look a lot like dance, and when his Brussels-based company, Ultima Vez, presents his latest work, "Always the Same Lies," at Northrop Auditorium Saturday, it will be part of the Northrop Dance Season, the Northrop-Walker Art Center "Discover" series and the Walker's World Visions International Festival, which seems like a lot of weight to carry for an 80-minute work that may or may not be dance.

What are these kinetic adventures Vandekeybus puts on stage? They're fierce and fast, highly emotional, filled with seemingly dangerous movement including collisions and falls and the hurling about of bodies. "The Messengers of Bad News," which he showed at the Ordway McKnight Theatre in 1989, was high-voltage to the max, even scary at times.

To John Killacky, the Walker's di-

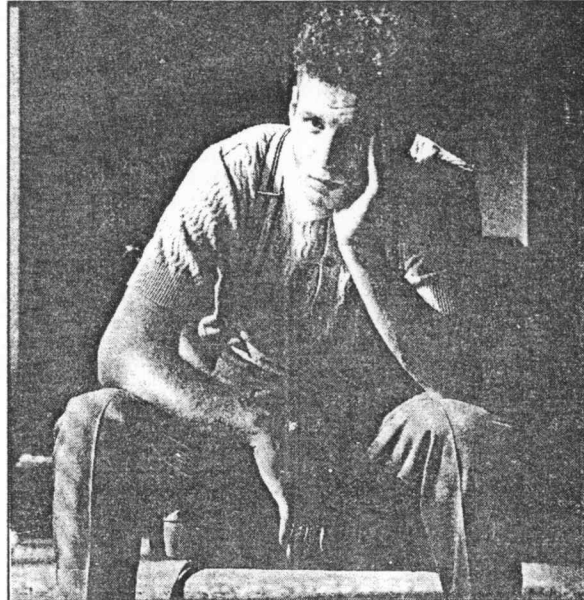


Photo by M.-F. Plissart

**Wim Vandekeybus: "Everything about my background and education was unconventional."**

rector of performing arts, "It's lyrical and athletic, risky and emotional, and very different from anyone else. It's an absolutely unique voice. The dance is stripped down, and it isn't technically virtuosic in the traditional sense, but it's about kineticism, about moving. Some have called it theatrical slam-dancing. It's driven and raw, and it rings true."

Alyce Dysette, head of the alternative-TV arts show "Alive From Off Center" produced by KTCA-TV, coproduced a video compilation of Vandekeybus' works and showed it on the program last August to great acclaim. To her, "Wim is one of the very few who lets the dance unfold, who flows from image to image without slapping you with them. Most dancers move from image to image, and you could care less what comes between them. With him, it's organic and edited, like good television; you can tell he's from a generation that grew up in front of TV."

Vandekeybus, speaking by phone from Los Angeles, said that "Always the Same Lies" also will be very physical, but it may be a bit

more theatrical, and it will incorporate film. The piece grew out of a meeting with an 88-year-old former actor named Carlos in Hamburg, Germany.

"We met off and on, and he was a very strange, very special man," said Vandekeybus. "His third wife had died years before, and he lived in solitude, so he had developed a very strong imagination to defend himself against being alone. He was very self-destructive, but, in his way, also very creatively constructive."

Vandekeybus filmed several conversations with this wise, crazy old man. That footage, projected above the stage, forms the core of the work, as the performers react physically to notions of age, loneliness and change.

"Everything about my background and education was unconventional," said Vandekeybus. "I hate the idea of isolating something to study it. How can you study dance or film by themselves? I want to work with lights and costumes and ideas myself, not have other people do it alone for me."

## Always the Same Lies

**Who:** Created by Wim Vandekeybus, performed by Ultima Vez as part of the Northrop Auditorium-Walker Art Center Discover Series.

**Where:** Northrop Auditorium, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

**When:** 8 p.m. today.

**Tickets:** \$9.50 to \$17.50. Call 624-2345.

He would like to explore television and film more and, in fact, will soon spend several months in Mexico preparing a film project.

Besides Fabre, few artists have influenced Vandekeybus, and he doesn't feel strongly connected to any scene in Europe, even the growing Belgian dance scene. "We are all very different, very individual. I work more poetically, less choreographically, more emotionally than intellectually," he said.

Said Dysette, "He isn't creating all those angst-ridden works, all that dark side of the inner being that is so popular in Europe right now. That's a great relief. There's an edge to his work, but there's a big difference between edge and angst."

To Killacky, "There is something wild and untamed about him. Perhaps because he doesn't have a long technical background in dance his impulses are on short fuses and delivered with a big impact."

That untamed quality may be explainable. Vandekeybus was one of six children of a veterinarian raised on a Flemish farm. His first awareness of movement came from watching animals, especially horses. "I loved this energy, this impulsive, unpredictable way of moving."

"I like movement to be organic, the way a horse's movement is when it abruptly avoids an obstacle," he said. "Growing up around animals was more important to me than an education in dance."