

Ultima Vez

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Not since the days of Peter Selars—with his "Search for New Forms" and his importation of such incendiaries as Squat Theatre and the Wooster Group—has the Kennedy Center experienced as flagrantly anarchic and iconoclastic a spectacle as a packed Terrace Theater witnessed Friday night in the local premiere of "Always the Same Lies," as part of the "Something New" series.

This 90-minute dance-theater phantasm was the latest work of Brussels-based Flemish choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his Ultima Vez troupe, founded in the mid-'80s. Vandekeybus, 27, is one of the European *Wunderhinder* who have been forging a new continental avant-garde and attracting wide international attention recently. His earlier "The Bearers of Bad News" was seen to explosive effect in Richmond last February. "Always the Same Lies," with a cast of five men (including Vandekeybus) and four women, aided by a page-long list of collaborators and co-produced by presenters of six nations including the United States, is even more histrionically eye- and ear-boggling than its predecessor.

I lie not when I tell you that after a multi-screen film about an octogenarian singer-dancer (Carlo Wegener, the work's inspiration and one of its creators), the piece began with the dancers on a floor-filling quilt made of colorful print dresses, later hoisted to become the backdrop; that a man sat upside down in a chair suspended from the ceiling; that three women swooped precariously over the stage in huge hammocks; that two men reclined on a "mattress" of 730 brown eggs; that performers delivered monologues in at least five languages; and that a woman made instant coffee by pouring hot water into her side pocket.

The physically punishing movement component of all this—brilliantly executed by the daredevil troupe—consisted mainly of the dancers hurling themselves like human projectiles through space, at the ground and at each other, in an extrapolation of the slam-dance concept. The piece carries you along irresistibly in its manic imagery and kinesthetic torrent, and it's much less formally chaotic than it may sound. But whether the sound and fury signify anything more than oversimplified *Zeitgeist* seems an open question.

—Alan M. Kriegsman