



gothamist™

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## Opinionist: *Comme Toujours Here I Stand*



Since founding in 1991, Big Dance Theater has been ebulliently blurring the traditional aesthetic boundaries between theater and dance, jumbling the two forms into often delightful yet esoteric performances. Their latest confection continues the tradition, but don't expect the term "theater" to include "narrative," at least not in any conventional sense. Called *Comme Toujours Here I Stand*, the hour-long piece is inspired by Agnès Varda's 1961 French New Wave film, *Cléo From 5 to 7*, which portrays, in real time, the life of a marginally talented pop singer waiting for the potentially dire results of a medical examination.

I haven't seen Varda's film, but that didn't seem to hinder my enjoyment of this giddy deconstruction. And it turns out the directors of Big Dance Theater hadn't seen it either, until very late in the production process, instead working with the screenplay as a "found object." In an interview with *New York Press*, co-director/choreographer Annie-B Parson says, "There's a part at the end, where one of the characters says this long piece of text which makes absolutely no sense. It turns out, when I finally did see the movie, it's a song. And I didn't know that. So I turned it into something completely different. So that's the beauty of not knowing; it gave me the possibility of being trapped into finding my own solutions."



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The whirling precision of the choreography and technical elements—which include live video projection, song, a rolling staircase, and movable walls—is très charming. And as ever with this company, the sound and lighting design is immaculate, with the effervescent performances saturated in happy pastels. As the star, company co-founder Molly Hickok is a comic paragon of petulance, whose dread over those test results is repeatedly shattered by the romanticized joys of '60s France: shopping, smoking, dancing, fashion. And just when the production's coolly cerebral spell starts to wear off, all that chic style is abruptly stripped away, leaving Hickok alone for an unexpectedly intimate scene with actor Ryutaro Mishima. Alone in the dark space with just their giant silhouettes, the piece finally fades out on one simple note of vulnerability, the final surprise in an evening bursting with them.

*Comme Toujours Here I Stand will be performed tonight at 8 p.m., then Wednesday-Saturday, October 7th-10th at 8 p.m. at The Kitchen (512 West 19th Street). Tickets are \$15.*