

Ivo van Hove Escorts Cocteau to Governor's Island

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Almost half of the listed “running time” for *La Voix Humaine* is actually schlepping time, as the audience tromps en masse to and then from an Area 51-like warehouse in the nether recesses of Governor's Island. Tucked away there is the latest depth charge by Ivo van Hove, who has jettisoned much of his high-tech trickery for a spare, raw, enormously affecting production of Jean Cocteau's 1930 monologue, brought to incisive life by Halina Reijn.

“The style of this play excludes anything resembling vigor,” Cocteau specified of the piece, an extended phone conversation between an unnamed woman (Reijn) and the man who has jilted her. Once again, Van Hove has ignored such instructions to a play's benefit. Vigor, along with a scouring array of other emotions, courses through the woman's face and body as she wheedles, sobs, and bluffs her way to something vaguely resembling dignity. Until a cutesy musical gag at the very end, the often invasive director confines his embellishments to a handful of visual filigrees, trusting Reijn to navigate the play's austere beauty on her own. And so a famously controlling director has tackled the story of a woman losing control—or realizing that she never had it to begin with. Plenty to chew on during that long walk back, and for a good while afterward.