

## Hofesh Shechter at the Roundhouse

Israeli-born choreographer Hofesh Shechter pulls off a coup at London's Roundhouse.

By Mark Monahan

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Last week, at the Roundhouse, choreographer Hofesh Shechter pulled off a coup. For years, pop stars have been turning their gigs into dance spectacles. What he now did, in large part at least, was to transform a contemporary dance show into a rock gig.

It says much about the Israeli-born, London-based Shechter's clout and reach that the standing area was packed with teenagers snapping the stage with their phones, while sitting near me



Some frenzied, some furious, some content: In Your Rooms Photo: Alistair Muir

was the film director Terry Gilliam. Since 2007, when Shechter's diptych of *Uprising* and *In Your Rooms* was "fast-tracked" from The Place (small) to the Queen Elizabeth Hall (medium) and finally to Sadler's Wells (large), he has been the hottest thing in dance. And, although there were flaws with this step up to a still heftier venue (built in 1846 as an engine shed), it was still a rare experience.

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The evening launched with 15 minutes of jamming from Shechter (who also composes) and his percussive, 20-piece band. Stationed above the stage and integral to the action, the ensemble pulsated like some

enormous exotic organism and sounded like a flintier Massive Attack. Then, as the beat powered on, a bank of spotlights blazed over the sea of bobbing heads on the floor of this splendid relic of the Industrial Revolution, and the dance soon began.

It was a thrill as ever to see *Uprising*, Shechter's wry, turbo-charged tableau of seven supposed mates who would clearly like nothing better than to kick each other's teeth in. His witty portrayal of male bonding, his instinctive grasp of musical and stage dynamics, his fusion of club moves with a martial, virile vocabulary all his own, the zest of the dancing – it was an adrenalin-charged ride, and felt beefed up since its Sadler's run, too.

The bigger, more ambitious *In Your Rooms* – a bellow of existential angst – had definitely swelled to fill the space. As impressive as ever was Shechter's habit of cutting between the 17 dancers in different parts of the stage (some frenzied, some furious, some content), the throbbing diagonals of synchronised movement, the layering of order upon chaos upon order, and the symphonic pacing. And his score, which continued well after the dance finished, was subtly varied and yet hit you straight in the sternum.

Now those complaints. Despite the venue, neither piece was in fact in the round – the stage was rectangular and there was very much a fourth wall. And, while the belligerence of *Uprising* fitted the surroundings well, the psychological nuance and intimacy of *In Your Rooms* felt diluted. I was reliably informed that the jostling in the standing area was a further distraction, and even in the circle we were gazing out through steel columns.

It was at Sadler's, in 2007, that this programme found the ideal balance between scale and artistry. But, for sheer visual and sonic welly, Friday night will take some beating.

Rating \*\*\*\*

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