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Hofesh Shechter at the Brighton Dome

Just when you think you've got the measure of Hofesh Shechter he throws something unexpected and apt into the mix

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The Israeli choreographer Hofesh Shechter, based in London for the past seven years, has come so far so fast that you might think he's in danger of over-doing it. Just six years since creating his first work, Shechter is one of our busiest contemporary choreographers. And thanks to *Maxxie's Dance*, a little number he cooked up for the Channel 4 series *Skins*, he's also a big hit on YouTube.

But just when you think you've got the measure of him he throws something entirely unexpected and incredibly apt into the mix. It's called *The Art of Not Looking Back* (pictured), his striking new commission for the Brighton Festival.

Shechter's language has always throbbed with savage rhythms and uncompromising passions, but here it absorbs new motifs and new motivations in a work created for six women. In a voiceover (Shechter likes to talk to us, as well as write his own stridently percussive music), he tells us that his mother left him when he was 2 years old. What follows is both a moving tribute to motherhood and a rage against the pain of separation.

Childbirth is evoked in the soundtrack's alarming screams, which could be taken as the feral cry of an abandoned child. At times the women (all wonderful) move like automatons, at others their grace and energy are put to good use in phrases that vibrate with supple rhythms and elegant geometries. The piece is edgy, yes, and speaks of the stress that being a woman entails. But Shechter also deifies women while not forgiving for one moment the transgression of the one who left him.

The programme is also called *The Art of Not Looking Back*, even though the first half is all about retrospective viewing. It opens with three of Shechter's old works stitched together. *Fragments* (2003) is a duet for Philip Hulford and Ino Riga that takes us through the thorny layers and eventual breakdown of a relationship. Their private anxieties are reflected in the visceral and thrusting force of the dance. *Cult* (2004) concerns itself with the individual's role in society and with the fear of repressive regimes; its landscape is dark and despairing. *Untitled* (2005) takes Hulford on a solo journey through life, love and death, but says more about how Shechter sees the roles of choreographer, audience and dancer. It's fascinating stuff.



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