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Hofesh Shechter at the Roundhouse, London NW1

Donald Hutera



Accepting a Critics' Circle National Dance Award for best choreography (modern) in January, Hofesh Shechter described his win as "a paradox since much of my work is based on being a loser". The young, Israeli-born dance-maker himself is anything but. Capitalising on his knack for creating big, gutsy and moody group pieces, and scoring them as well, many organisations - including the country's top dance venue, Sadler's Wells - have helped to groom Shechter for stardom.



To judge by the double bill presented at the Roundhouse last weekend, confidence in his talent seems well placed. The Choreographer's Cut, as the event was called, was as much a rock-styled gig as a dance performance. The award-winning In Your Rooms and its companion piece, Uprising, have been seen before. The difference here was the enlarged scale on which they were shown and heard, with 19 musicians (mainly percussion and strings) delivering Shechter's densely loaded rhythms from tiered platforms above the stage.

The expansion robbed Uprising of some of its original impact. Not that this male septet has lost entirely its ambiguous charge. Like high-pressured primates the men scuttled fast and low across dark, smoky space, or circled through it like an invading (or escaping?) flock. Shechter wisely left unidentified the source of the combat fatigue afflicting these punchy urban warriors. Still, in this cavernous setting their fragmented agitation felt, at times, diffuse and overblown.

The tribal tensions of Rooms got better treatment. Featuring a finely tuned, 17-strong cast, this was an impressive depiction of an unstable, self-oppressed society ready to boil over or implode. Men and women shuffled or skulked through cross-patterned neo-folk steps, clustering together with raised fists or creeping about as if to avoid - or perpetrate - an unspecified harm. Hard not to read their visceral expressions of isolation and strife as an oblique critique of conditions in the Middle East, but that would be reductive. Strong kinetic images and cinematic rhythms supported ideas that Shechter either implied or articulated, with blunt irony, via intermittent (and intrusive) voiceovers. Pitched somewhere between philosophy and politics, this bold, earthy dance was smartly conceived.

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