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Hofesh Shechter Company

Dome, Brighton

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**Judith Mackrell**

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Tightly knit ... Political Mother. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

Hofesh Shechter's latest work detonates on stage in a scattershot of shattering political imagery. A samurai soldier performs ritual hara-kiri while a dictator, standing high above his skewered body, rants out a guttural message of triumph. Two men dance with ardent, springy folk steps to the music of Verdi, hero of the Risorgimento, until they are scattered by the bullying tattoo of four military drummers.

Hofesh Shechter Company

Sadler's Wells,

London

Starts 14 July

Until 17 July

Box office:

0844 412 4300

[Venue website](#)

In *Political Mother*, Shechter returns to his most characteristic theme, puzzling over the mechanisms of state and society, but his focus here is on the ways in which ideals of camaraderie, duty and service can be annexed and brutalised by a repressive power.

Folk dance, always a powerful element in Shechter's work, is the dominant language. His 10 dancers lift their hands to the skies and bow their heads as they stamp and leap in unison – intricate floor patterns bind them. But with subtle manipulations, Shechter then tweaks the vocabulary so that it faces in two directions, towards servitude and freedom.

In some sections, the dancers appear in prison fatigues, and as their body language turns slumped and shuffling, it is as if the communal steps they dance have become shackles round their ankles. In other sections the same moves acquire an exhilarating charge – the military drummers are replaced by thrashing guitarists, and the trembling dancers are united by the collective high of a rock gig.

These constant shifts of meaning are kept in suspension by a stage design of smoky shadows and cutting rays of light as well as the tightly knit structure of Shechter's choreography.

Occasionally there are moments where the tension sags; at 70 minutes, *Political Mother* is the longest work Shechter has made, and it doesn't quite have sufficient content to

justify its length. The final section, during which the work rewinds itself, also feels like a repeat performance of last year's *The Art of Not Looking Back*, which so memorably featured that same device.

But neither flaw undercuts the fact that Shechter has created a work of galvanising challenging power. In the last but one scene a gnomic phrase appears, spelled out in lights: "Where there is pressure there is folk dance." Above it stand the quartet of thrashing guitarists, below it the military drummers. In terms of this single image Schechter dares us to rethink the history of the world. You have to love his ambition.

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