

Hofesh Shechter Company

Teachers' notes for GCSE, A Level & BTEC dance students



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1. ABOUT HOFESH SHECHTER

Hofesh Shechter burst onto the UK dance scene in 2004 as an emergent choreographer, and has quickly become one of the fastest rising stars in the UK dance world. His unique movement style and vocabulary have left audiences in no doubt that they are watching the exciting work of an original artist. Hofesh has trained and worked in numerous countries, though happily for the UK dance culture, he has adopted this country as his home and place of work for these past few years....*'Here it feels like everybody is not English, so hey...I'm at home...'*

The early years

Hofesh grew up in Jerusalem, *"...at the time my neighborhood was a rather quiet, residential place with lots of white kind of six story buildings..."* where music and dance featured in his life from an early age. *'When I was six I was sent to learn piano. When about eight, I started to have weekly folk dance classes at school, and when twelve I joined a folk dance youth company that performed and toured quite a lot. When I was 15 I joined the school of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, first as a pianist, but after a week changed my mind and asked to join the dance department - they agreed happily.'* Asked to recall his first dance experience, Hofesh says...*'it was the folk dance classes at school. I felt awfully embarrassed!'*

Training

During his teenage years at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, Hofesh took a number of jobs to keep himself afloat, *'...I worked quite a lot as a kid, I reckon about a day or two a week on average. At 17 and 18 I regularly was a waiter to have some pocket money for myself and to pay for my driving licence.'* Following his training at the Academy, Hofesh worked professionally as a dancer with Batsheva Dance Company, Israel's leading and internationally renowned dance company. Music was never far from his heart though, as he explains, *'I first studied drums in Tel Aviv after leaving Batsheva Dance Company. I really wanted to get back into music and looked for a new angle to do so. Later on I moved to Paris and simply looked to learn more and expand my take and knowledge of drums, so joined the Agostiny College of Rhythm there. I was in Paris for about a year and half - just until I was invited to work as a drummer back in Israel in performances for schools and young children and saw it as a great opportunity to start practicing performing as a drummer.'*

Arriving in England in 2002, Hofesh soon found work in London with Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company, with whom he danced until deciding to make a break for it and try creating his own work. *'In 2004 I had a month off, and I used it to make my own choreography for a competition in Finland. After that I decided to drop everything else and not take any other dancing job. I would instead give a year of my life to try and be a choreographer, and to really go for it.'* His career

to date has been impressive – but has there ever been a time when his nerve faltered and he didn't think he would 'make it' as a dancer, musician, choreographer, composer?

'I am still not sure I made the right choice with my career!... But I try not to think about it in these terms. I did always what I felt was interesting and with potential development for me.' Has he ever had to do a job he didn't like, to pay the rent? *'When I arrived in London, even though I thought I came prepared - I wasn't, and money was just spilling between my fingers and gone... I worked as a security guard for one weekend and promised myself to never do it again...'*

Growing success

After making his first piece *Fragments*, for the 2004 Resolution! Season at The Place, Hofesh was invited to become Associate Artist there, a position he remained in until 2006. John Ashford, (Director of the Robin Howard Dance Theatre @ The Place) spotted a unique talent that he knew would go far, and offered him this opportunity. How does Hofesh feel about this early break?



'On being offered the Associate Artist scheme, it was immediately clear to me that this will change the course of my life. It meant that I would get a real chance to create, and expose my work to audiences. It was the one offer I was sitting and waiting for - it is a possibility, an option to create. I knew it meant nothing if I am not to use it to the fullest and take action - it's not a degree to put on the wall, it's an open door and you have to grab yourself and run through it. So I did. I used the studios whenever I could, often there is an empty space ready to be used...in any given day I could find three hours if I was ready to wait a bit, move to a different studio, wait a bit more, stay until 11pm...I gathered dancers and made work whenever possible, met and interacted with as many artists as I could to make a real exciting and full experience out of it. I took each and every offer I had to perform my work, even if I had to invest in it (which was the case many, many times). The Associate Artist opportunity at The Place was simply and undeniably invaluable.'

In the same year (2004) Hofesh was short listed to take part in the Place Prize, (a choreographic competition) and commissioned to make work for the competition. The result, entitled *Cult*, was a runaway success, winning the audience vote 5 times over 10 performances, and touring internationally following the competition. How important does he feel this competition was for his career? *'It was a great opportunity, and also about being in the right place at the right time. It kicked me 'onstage' in the UK dance scene in a fraction of a second.'* *Cult*, a piece that is explosive, ironic, emotional, dark..... and many other things besides...caused one dance critic (Mary Brennan, The Herald, 2006) to write the following *'If Woody Allen had gone into choreography, he probably would have made dance like this.'* Not bad going, for his second major piece of work...

The press

It's difficult to find any reviews that wholly disapprove of Hofesh's work...in the main they are highly complimentary and demand that we 'watch this space' for the future work of an inventive choreographer, who is not afraid to be ambitious in his vision. Hofesh has been described as '*...a true original*' (Judith Mackrell, The Guardian 2005)...making '*a dazzling display by a star on the fast track*' (Daily Telegraph, 2007). Such praise cannot go un-noticed by Hofesh – how does he feel to be lauded so highly in the press? '*It certainly feels pleasant and satisfying, for a short while, to read such reviews. I appreciate reviews that actually respond emotionally and reasonably to the work, that break it down to details a bit, that explain their thoughts and sensations from the work. I must say that my opinion on the work does not change when I read the reviews - the reviews actually say nothing really about the work, they say something about the people watching the work.*'

Does he feel that each glowing review adds pressure to make the next piece bigger and better than the last? '*The size of my work, or the reasons to make a sizeable work have to be connected to the essence of the work. It needs to have a reason, a feeling, a thought, an interest. I won't make a sizeable work just for the sake of it being big.*'



Many performers and creators go to great lengths to ensure us that they don't ever read their reviews, that what people write about their work is irrelevant to them. Is he one of these people? Clearly not. '*I read as many reviews as I can get my hands on. I don't know if that's a good thing or not, I tried to stop doing it*

for a while but I'm too curious. My theory now is that you can learn something from every read of a review - if not about the work or about the reviewer – it's about yourself, and how and why you respond the way you do to the words, ideas, attacks, compliments etc. In the end of the day it's all nonsense anyway, chatting and mumbling about a dance work. Talking about it is pulling it away so far from the art form that it is - live performance that is powerful and completely mysterious, an old ceremony, and far from the cognitive thought, actually. The reviewers though are supposedly representing the opinion and responses of the very people I am trying to communicate with, to share my thoughts and feelings with - it is important to me to know how they took it. The problem again is of course they won't always represent the experience of ALL the audience, but only of themselves. I take it then as one man's/woman's opinion.'

2. ABOUT HIS COMPANY

Why he set it up and how it is funded

As is often the case with emerging, unfunded companies, Hofesh was working on a project basis, piece by piece – finding studio space wherever he could, drawing together dancers to make and rehearse work, and then touring it. During his time as Associate Artist at The Place, he was offered some project management support by Helen Shute, who was Programming Associate there at the Robin Howard Dance Theatre. Helen subsequently wrote a successful funding application for Hofesh that funded a co-production between three venues (The Place, Sadler's Wells and the South Bank Centre) and led to the creation of his 2007 piece *In Your Rooms*. This was an unusual collaboration – a co-commission between three leading dance venues in London – the first of its kind. This led to a very successful run of performances, at all three venues, with months in between the shows at each venue, for Hofesh to revisit the work in the studio - to hone, refine and reshape it. This was a rare opportunity for a choreographer to have, and meant that Hofesh could experiment a little in between runs. Speaking after one period of refining, he said... *'It's amazing how important the little details and the rhythm become. Now, when I look at it, it's much more fluent and easy to digest. It just rolls much better because it's in a more skilful place.'*

In that year, Luke Jennings, Dance Critic for The Observer, writing about *In Your Rooms* felt it was... *'probably the most important new dance work to be created in Britain since the millennium.'* He was clearly not alone, with Hofesh acquiring a loyal fan base both in the capital city and beyond. Following this successful project, and supported by reviews like this, it comes as little surprise that demand for Hofesh's work was now immense. It became clear that he could no longer operate on a project basis. Following the final Sadler's Wells performances of this co-production, by which time Hofesh was being inundated with requests to show his work and make new work, full time project management was clearly needed. He also needed to be able to keep his dancers on longer contracts – not

only to secure them for his work and the touring schedule, but also to give them some job security. Helen left her job at The Place to work full time with Hofesh, setting up the company, which became an Arts Council RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) in April 2008. Additional funding for the current Autumn 2008 tour has been secured from The Jerwood Foundation (for the live music), ACE Wales, and Esme Fairbairn.

Behind the scenes

So what exactly is involved in running the company? Let's ask a few people who know...

Job profile 1

Who are you and what is your job title?

'My name is Helen Shute and I am Producer for the Hofesh Shechter Company.'

What do you do?

'Well, my job is loosely to shape the company, book tours, negotiate fees and contracts with venues and our dancers, plan projects and raise the money to run these projects by writing funding applications. I take care of the external face of the company through our press and marketing – I work with freelance contractors to do this. Through all of this, I always need to make sure that Hofesh is getting to do the work that he wants!'

'I always travel with the company – I think this is really important in terms of developing our relationship with the different venues & countries we go to. It also helps me to know the work and the dancers very well. It helps me to plan better for the future and means I can make sure we are always improving the way we do things.'

'I also represent Hofesh outside of the company, for example when he works on commissions etc. This way I can make sure that things work well for both him and the company, maximizing opportunities for both. I don't represent him for music or commercial work though – he now has agents for this.'

What is the hardest part of your job?

'I think it's the responsibility of knowing that nothing will happen if I don't raise the money....write that funding application....steer the long term planning of the company. Oh, and writing evaluations – I don't like doing those at all!'

'Another difficult part of my job is trying to think like Hofesh – to decide what he would want to do without asking him....he's very unpredictable and I'm often surprised by him!'

What is the most rewarding part?

'Seeing it all happen – and not just the performances...all of it. Knowing that Hofesh is working in the studio, seeing the dancers turning up every day.... A big part of my job is future planning and looking forward and onward, so to see the work actually happen on a day to day basis - in the studio, on stage...that's really rewarding for me.'

Job Profile 2

Who are you and what is your job title?

'My name is Colette Hansford and I am General Manager for the Hofesh Shechter Company.'

What do you do?

'I am responsible for the day-to-day administration of the company. I take care of the budgets and our finances. I communicate with all of the company – Hofesh, Helen, the dancers, a freelance Production Manager, technicians who travel with us, lighting designers and so on – making sure they all have up to date rehearsal and touring schedules, and know where they have to be and by what time!'

'I book all our travel, and accommodation, which can be a little time consuming...so during busy pre-tour periods I have some administrative support from a freelance administrator. He or she can open mail, respond to emails and chase accommodation responses for me, and so on, whilst I can get on with the even more urgent things on my list.'

'I sometimes travel with the company too, essentially acting as a tour manager whilst they are on the road. This means that I am on hand to deal with any practical issues that may arise on the spot – for example an injured dancer needing to find treatment, or a lost passport.'

What does an average day look like for you before an overseas tour date?

'Pretty busy! Just before the company is about to go out on the road I need to focus on all the details, big and small. I might spend half my day putting together and double-checking all the travel information and tickets for whoever is Tour Manager for that trip. We tour with up to 23 people...so there are a lot of details to cover and a lot of people to think about! I would then just double-check all the contracts and maybe run a few last minute errands – for example getting to the bank and taking out all the per diems for the dancers and crew. I'd send a quick email to the venue to check that everything is in place for when the company arrives. I'd also be checking on all pick-ups and drop-offs I've organized to and from airports or train stations.'

Can you then relax when you know they've all safely caught the plane on time?

'No! From the moment I've handed all the travel information over to the Tour Manager, I can't relax until I know that they are all home safely again! Everything I do when managing a tour is about the well being of the company – to make sure their touring goes as smoothly as possible, so it's hard to relax because so much can go wrong! Helen and I stay in text contact throughout performance dates so she can let me know it's all running along ok, and I'll also send texts to the dancers and technicians wishing them a good performance.'

On tour

This current tour is the longest UK tour that the company has undertaken...and relies on a whole team of people to see it through – see pages 5 - 7! For Hofesh, it represents a new phase in the life of the company – further embedding it into the UK middle scale touring circuit, and getting the work seen by more and more new and diverse audiences in this country...*'I am really excited about the fact that we are going to perform in so many different places in the UK, and I look forward to seeing audiences' responses. Actually I'm happy to bring it to them so they can get 'exposed' to it and see it.'*

Hofesh often dances in his own work. Does he do this through choice or necessity? *'I wouldn't know the difference between choice and necessity even if I try really hard to separate them..., but I often dance in the work because I'm taking an active part in creating the work, with a lot of attention to the movement material, which is the bread and butter of the work.'* Hofesh clearly enjoys being in the midst of his performers on stage in his work. He explains further, *'Compare it to, say being a chef - you need to actually make the soup with your own hands. It's not enough to have the idea for it - you need to taste it, change it, try again, let it into you and be in it, to really connect and understand and direct this soup to a tasty, tasty place!...'*



As a choreographer, there must be some pros and cons to performing in one's own work. How does Hofesh feel about the positive aspects of this?

'Well, it's healthy, fun, interesting, challenging and inspiring, being connected with the work from the inside, being able to effect and stir the work in real time.' And is there a negative side to being on stage with his dancers? *'Yes...if the get-in is long and complex, it's difficult to gather the energy and 'click' into performer's mode. Plus I can't see the work from the outside for improving light, sound etc. And obviously I can't see the dancers to give them corrections and notes after the show.'*

Uprising involves 7 dancers, and *In Your Rooms* has 12 dancers, plus the musicians wherever live music is possible. Let's meet a few of them and find out what life is like on tour with Hofesh and his company.



'Hi, I'm Yen-Ching and I've been dancing in Hofesh's work since 2005 when I was in Cult. Before a show I warm up by doing some Yoga, improvisation, a bit of ballet barre – it depends how my body is feeling and what it needs on the performance day. After a show I unwind by having a good stretch. What do I always pack for touring?

My laptop, costumes, vitamins and...myself!'



'Hi, I'm Elias and I've been dancing in Hofesh's work since the beginning of 2007. How would I describe his movement? For me, it's freestyle explosive implosive and very organic and harmonious. I use yoga to warm up before a show – and then I go through all the material of the piece, on my own, just to be prepared for the real thing. After the performance I have to have a hot bathtub and good food – always! My tour treat is a good breakfast, every day. Every

time I pack my tour bag I make sure I have my laptop, a yoga book and some good movies.'



'Hi I'm Lucy and I've recently joined the company to play double bass for In Your Rooms. My favourite treat on tour is to have a spa. There are often great spas in hotels and to have a lovely swim and then a laze about in steam rooms really helps alleviate the aches and pains of playing and travelling.' And what 3 things does she always pack on tour? *'A good book, my ipod and/ or laptop and a definitely a swimming costume.'*

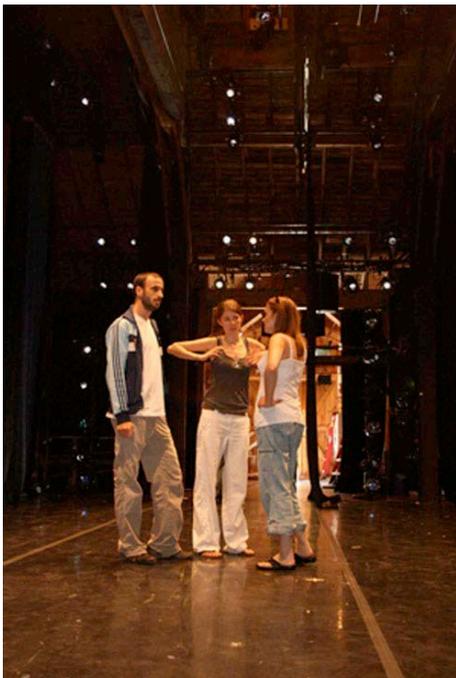
(See [4. THE CURRENT REP](#) for more from Yen-Ching, Elias and Lucy)

But what about Hofesh, the man at the helm of all this touring? What 3 things does he always pack in his bag...? *'My lap-top, my passport, my credit-card. It's all you need....'*

Some behind the scenes photographs of the company on tour



Helen convincing Hofesh about changing Jenny's costume ahead of the performance in Kalamata, Greece (she used to wear woolen trousers... in that heat they were pretty unbearable!)



Hofesh, Helen and Colette backstage, working together to solve a problem in Jacob's Pillow, USA



Hofesh rehearsing with Yen Ching and Leon before a show

3. THE WORK

Creative process

Making the movement

Let's take a look at Hofesh's creative process, in the studio with his company. Does he ask the dancers to improvise around ideas/movements until he sees what he likes? Or does he have a clear idea of the movement he wants to create? *'It's a combination of the two. Dancers' improvisation is mostly inspiring for finding atmosphere, the rules of the world we create. With the movement, I am much more strict and look for very specific stuff, but I can't define what that is.'* However, Hofesh is keen to clarify that it isn't simply a case of searching for movement he 'likes' when he sets an improvisation up in the studio. It goes much deeper than that... *'I'm searching for triggers - these can activate more than just a pleasant place, I wish to find a richness of triggers to create a total experience of sensations, feelings and thoughts. It's all about getting sharper. Improving the machine that is us.'*



Choreographers, film makers, and composers alike, will all tell you that cutting material is a hard thing to do...particularly when you know how much work has gone into its creation. So how ruthless is Hofesh at editing his own work? *'Totally ruthless. It's painful, but at the same time when the movement is cut, I don't care about it anymore. I don't do favours to the movements, to my dancers and certainly not to myself. The greater good is always more important - a wonderful dance sequence that doesn't fit in the work will anyway lose its wonderfulness, so best to just get rid of it. I think the rate is about 15-20% of the movement material we make in the studio, makes it in to the work. The rest goes. This is not an exaggeration at all, if anything the percentage that actually makes it in is even lower...'*

Making the music

Not only does Hofesh create (ruthlessly edit!) and dance in his work, he also composes the music. He can also sometimes be seen during *In Your Rooms*, playing the live score, (for example for the Nottingham dates on the forthcoming tour). *'It's fun playing for the piece. I really enjoy it.'*

So why does Hofesh write all his own music too? Isn't making and performing in his pieces enough work for one person? *'I'm actually not talented at all. I just create loads of material and wait for something to happen. When this thing happens I know it, and then I use it.....Actually, the music was the first thing I started with, when I made my first choreography...and it's very convenient being your own composer. I understand all my demands very quickly...I can spend a lot of time looking for sounds that will portray exactly the atmosphere in the space that I'm trying to find....'* And so, which comes first for Hofesh...the music or the movement? *'I create sketches of sounds and I take them into the studio....and that starts to inspire the dance piece.'*

Hofesh works with his musicians in much the same way as he does with his dancers – improvising to create atmospheres, worlds... before the score is developed. One musician, Lucy Shaw, currently touring with the company, explains further, *'Initially a lot of time is spent with Hofesh and the musicians to create certain sound worlds and develop the score. This devised nature of the music gives it room to breathe and evolve with the dancing.'*

Finishing the piece

Hofesh's creative process sounds like a lot of hard work for himself, as well as his performers. How does he feel as a premiere approaches? *'Towards the end of creation there is a point which I call 'point of no return'... it's when it's too late to cancel the show and there is no more time for thinking and trying. It is a moment where you must make a quick decision every minute that passes; otherwise it won't be ready in time. At that point, I am completely taken over by the work and some emotion inside me steps aside to allow this decision making to happen. Making fast decisions like this is a very, very interesting and mysterious thing...'*

Being controversial

In the past, Hofesh has been quoted as saying that much contemporary dance in this country is boring. So does he see himself as somebody who can shake things up a bit? Say the unsayable? *'It would be very difficult to shake a whole country up and I don't pretend to do so. On the other hand, I do see that my work does shake some people up... a bit here, a bit there. I believe that change is meaningful in every size, therefore look for small change, but many times. I don't have to see myself as somebody who can say the unsayable - everybody can do that and is free to do it when and where they wish!'*

Politics

Hofesh is often asked about his work in a political context, whether it carries a political message. How does he feel about this type of question being levelled at him? *'I haven't made up my mind yet. I mean, why would anyone want to hear anything I want to say about politics? What makes me more of an expert about it than any bloke in the street? On the other hand, if people want to listen then I'd better use it to help and improve things. I'm just not sure that talking politics is something that can improve anything. Poetry is much, much better. And dance is a form of poetry.'*

Does Hofesh feel it is inevitable (perhaps given his nationality and the situation, both past and present, in the Middle East), that people might often look for a political message in his pieces? *'I guess it is inevitable. I think it's because most of my audience that has 'political awareness' perhaps feels past guilt for occupying half the world...maybe I am a sort of a reminder.'*

'Politics is all about taking sides...being right...being wrong...and I find this ridiculous. Who defines what's right and wrong? And if someone did - maybe they lied? It's a cultural agenda, fashion. You can justify killing anybody at anytime – for example the Nazis thought they had excellent definitions of right and wrong with clear, scientific reasoning behind it. They ruled in progressed times as a European empire, yet they brought nothing but fear and carnage. You can go in circles forever defining good and bad and all you've got is the twisted, misinformed education you received, repeating words you learned, ideas that aren't yours. Politics lives and breathes on these elements, on hollow words and propaganda. Dance on the other hand is connected to the body, to the instincts, to the wisdom of our cells, to the right here and right now. ...this is not a political statement. Most definitely not. It's a statement not even recognized in political terms.'

4. THE CURRENT REP

Uprising

'Instantly, you're hooked....a dense, meticulous and furiously energetic cocktail of steps....Atmospheric, exciting stuff.' (Mark Monahan, Daily Telegraph, 2007).

'...wildly, roughly physical and large scale, it is also manically precise and detailed....Mr. Shechter has his own choreographic view of the world, one in which movement is both primal force and nuanced expression of the inexpressible.' (Roslyn Sulcas, New York Times, 2008).



'I finished it and I thought - Wow, I made a big piece. We have to conquer the stage now.' (Hofesh Shechter, in conversation with Donald Hutera, 2007)

Made in 2006, *Uprising* is an engaging and exciting piece for seven men and a powerful, pounding soundtrack. The piece plays with the idea of boys' behaviour – playing and fighting, brotherhood and friendship.

In Your Rooms

'...it's probably the most important new dance work to be created in Britain since the millennium.....These images are so close to the processes of the subconscious that it's almost shocking...' (Luke Jennings, The Observer, 2007)

'It's an arrestingly powerful piece.....choreographed with such verve that its effect is almost ecstatic.' (Judith Mackrell, The Guardian, 2007)

'It's the tension between individual and group, between chaos and order, between men and women, between private needs and the ceremonial, or of being an animal inside a ceremony. What I like about the piece, and what I feel when I see it, is a certain quality of loneliness inside a huge, beautifully functioning machine. They're all together, and everybody knows exactly what they're doing, but they're all alone. I really like this very isolated feeling.' (Hofesh Shechter, in conversation with Donald Hutera, 2007)

Made in 2007 this piece for twelve dancers (six men, six women), presents the audience with lightening fast images, zooming into and out of places, rituals and secrets, *'...it has the hurtling dynamic and impossible logic of a dream.'* (Luke Jennings, The Observer, 2007). *In Your Rooms* was nominated for The South Bank Show Dance Award 2008.

From a dancer's perspective

This piece has been performed for two years now, and has had a few different casts. Yen-Ching has been dancing with Hofesh on and off since 2005 and tells us how she feels about his movement language. *'There is a richness to Hofesh's movement quality. Apart from his fluid, grounded, animalistic style, his material has a very human quality. Hofesh's movement is not merely dance steps (which one can name or recognise). The movement has a purpose behind it; he uses movement as a vehicle of communication.'* The movement looks like it comes from Hofesh's own frame, height & physicality - so is it hard to learn? To get it 'into' your own body? *'In the beginning, it took time for my body to get into Hofesh's style of movement. From time to time, the body understands the movement quality, and starts to explore different things and elements, which Hofesh asks for in the work. Over time, it got easier to learn and get his style into my own body.'*

Elias, another dancer in the piece, feels that it evolves with each performance, *'I feel that every time we perform the piece there is more information and material that we discover. So every time there is much more responsibility for it's structure, in a way it's becoming fuller and fuller...'* And how does it feel to be inside the piece? *'It has so many emotional stages it's as if we are passing through an adventure with all the dancers. There is something really strong - the*

music, and there is a map - the structure. These are the elements that we have in order to pass through this adventure.'

From a musician's perspective

In Your Rooms is accompanied by live music on stage wherever possible. Musician Lucy Shaw has been playing double bass for this piece on tour since June this year and gives us an insight into the work from the musicians' point of view. Asked to describe the music, she says, *'It is scored for live percussion, live strings and pre-recorded backing track. It combines a mixture of abstract sounds with more traditional uses of the instruments and plays with the juxtaposition of extreme rhythm and non rhythmic free playing.'* There is no written set score on paper though, as she explains, *'...instead the pre-recorded sounds provides a stable score with set cues and sections. The musicians have designated areas of music to play, some pre composed and some more improvisatory. We are very experienced at improvising together and are also very aware of the dancers' actions, so the music and dance are weaved together...'*

In a piece as complex as *In Your Rooms*, there must be many cues between the dancers and musicians. Lucy describes how this works, *'There are set cues from the dancers for the musicians and from the music for the dancers. There is no need for eye contact between dancers and musicians but the musicians have eye contact with each other, although parts of the show have moments of blackout. The whole piece is underpinned by the pre-recorded backing track and there is a lot of counting!'*

It is clear when watching the piece that the musicians have a pretty physical work out too...so warming up is just as important for them as it is for the dancers, *'I will warm up before a show by playing a few scales or just some exercises on my bass and making sure it is in tune. I will also make sure I am physically warmed up (my arm and back muscles) so I do not strain a muscle and this also helps me to focus my mind and concentrate on the show.'* And after the show? How do the musicians cool down? *'It has been known for us to have a few rounds of table tennis (!) but in general we all just gather and maybe have some food with the dancers.'*



5. SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Hofesh's work covers every human emotion... *'Anguish and anger, love and loneliness, pain and protest, fear and frustration: there isn't a nerve left untouched in the space of 40 minutes.'* (Debra Craine, The Times 2007).

How did you feel watching the performance? What was your immediate response to the work?

Uprising

What themes emerged for you in *Uprising*? (See Hofesh's thoughts in 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATIVE MOVEMENT TASKS, re the themes in this work). Did you have any favourite parts? Why did these particular bits stay with you after the show?

How would you describe the piece? Try using just 3 words...

The opening section of the piece is literally blinding, as a huge bank of lights shine out over the audience. How did this make you feel?



Hofesh has said of this piece that he didn't want his audience to *'just sit and watch god-like [and not become] so emotionally involved. Uprising [is] where you don't have a choice because basically I grab your mind and pull it onstage. I know my task is to keep each individual in the audience bubbling with questions.'* Which parts of the piece were you most emotionally involved in? Did you feel empathy with the dancers as they fought and played?

The music for *Uprising* is loud and intense. Can you imagine watching this piece in total silence? How would it change for you?

In Your Rooms

'If you think about the cosmos as a complex thing...full of endless, rather chaotic elements and details...'

Do you recognise this quote? When you heard it, in the darkness, at the start of the piece, what were you expecting to see on stage when the lights came up?

How would you describe Hofesh's movement style?

This piece has been compared to the subconscious, with *'the hurtling dynamic and impossible logic of a dream.'* Do you agree? What did the piece make you think of?

Describe the music – how did it add to the movement taking place on stage?
(See 3. THE WORK for information on the music Hofesh composes for his work).

The lighting for this piece, designed by Lee Curan, has been described as dark and brooding. Hofesh wanted to create ‘*an atmosphere of cave-like darkness*’... Can you imagine this piece ‘working’ on a fully lit stage? Why not? Discuss the lighting as a vital element of the performance.

If you saw a performance with live music, did having the musicians on stage add to the atmosphere of the work for you? Hofesh’s aim was that ‘*the audience can choose to either look at them, or the choreography, or stare somewhere in the middle and try to grab it all.*’ Where did you look? Why?



6. SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATIVE MOVEMENT TASKS

Uprising

‘The piece is dealing with boys’ energy, with boys’ mentality, with boys’ behaviour...mainly with the idea of playing and fighting...of liking to play and to fight...of how fun it is to be part of a war, you know....’ (Hofesh Shechter in conversation for The Culture Show, 2008)

Solo work – balance and crumble

Use the very opening section of the piece as your inspiration, and find a strong pulse/drumbeat track to work with. As a group start in stillness, each dancer in their own space. Take 8 forceful strides in any direction. Strike a balance for 8 counts. Keep a strong, defiant focus. After these 8 counts, slowly crumble away from your position and slope off to a new spot in the space. Face a new direction and repeat this task with renewed energy and commitment, each time with a different balancing position.

Intention – think about how you walk. Stand tall and swing your arms, take large strides. Be as bold as you can. Hit your balance and try to sustain it. Think about showing off, trying to gain somebody’s attention. Towards the end of your balance, change your mood...suddenly you don’t feel so important or so strong. Dissolve your balance so that it crumbles away into nothing.

After you have played about with this idea as a group for a while, try sharing these 'balance & crumble' solos in smaller groups. Look for a real contrast between the bold, confident balances and the fragile, insecure crumbings.

Solo work – travelling

Think about all the different ways of travelling the dancers used in the piece:

- Running in a wide circle, arms held out to the sides
- Scuttling in a crouch very close to the floor on feet and knuckles
- Low running, body bent forward over legs, hands just brushing the floor
- Rolling and turning
- Lying on back, knees bent, heels digging into floor to push the body backwards

Discuss how they differ, and which ones you really liked. Can you remember any more?

In a space on your own, choose 3 of your favourite travelling motifs from the piece and explore them, finding your own version. Link these 3 motifs together in any order you like.

As a group, all find a space in the room as your fixed point. Taking an interesting pathway rather than just a straight line, use these 3 travelling modes to get yourself to a new point in the room, as far away from your starting point as possible. Repeat this a few times.

Solo work – nightclub grooving

Do you remember certain naturalistic movements that occur throughout the piece? Maybe the low kicking step that the dancers perform with their backs to us, as if in their own world. Or a low, side-to-side step, elbows lifted, in a line up at the front of the stage. It looks like they could be in a club, just having a quiet groove to the tunes.

Using this as your inspiration, and with a good upbeat tune playing to give you a pulse, find your own world and discover your personal nightclub groove. Keep it simple, low key and natural. Don't think about it too hard!

Ideas for development of these solos:

You now have 3 very different pieces of solo material

- Balance and crumble
- Travelling through space
- Nightclub grooving

- Either taking elements of each, or linking each piece of solo material end to end, create your own *Uprising*-inspired piece of solo movement

- Explore the different levels in space you are using in each of these sections. Try to accentuate these different levels
- Play around with the speed and energy that you dance with – can your balance and crumble movement be fast and bold, whilst your nightclub groove material remains more relaxed? Can your travelling runs have energy and drive, whilst your travelling rolls could be more frantic and uneasy?
- Think about the different moods you wish to portray through this different solo material. Are you confident? Showing off? Anxious? Insecure? In a hurry? Feeling chilled out? How can you show these different moods through the quality of your movement? It's not just about speed! Think about your focus, your posture, your body language, your face... *Uprising* has been described as both epic and fragile – can you show both these extremes in your solo work?
- Join with a partner and try dancing these solos simultaneously, very close together. As you hit your balances, see if you can make contact with each other, either offering support in your balance, or trying to compete a little and knock each other off balance
- Join up with 3 or 4 other dancers and concentrate on your balance and crumble solo material. Try creating your own *Uprising* opening section - all start in a line, as the dancers in *Uprising* do, facing the same direction. Stride to the front of the space to hit your balance. As you crumble away, regroup at another starting line up, facing a new direction. Repeat.
- Teach each other your different balancing positions, so that sometimes you all hit the same one, and other times you are all balancing differently
- Create some duets from this solo work – find a partner and teach each other your personal nightclub groove movement. Link them up together eg. 8 counts of one dancer's version followed immediately by 8 counts of the other's. Dance this together with your backs to the audience, in a world of your own
- In *Uprising*, there is darkness for the dancers to melt into and out of...but you don't have this – so think about how you leave and enter the space before you join each other to dance your nightclub groove. Could you use one of the travelling motifs you explored previously?
- Think about entering the space from different places in the room. Try leaving the space together, by chasing each other round one circuit of the room, using the running with arms out wide travelling motif

Duet work

In the opening section of *Uprising*, there is some duet work. Can you recall the main elements of this?

- Weight bearing and support
- Counter balancing away and towards each other
- A sense of struggle and play fighting
- A gentle, simple lift

Using this as your inspiration, with a partner explore and play with the idea of fighting – use your weight against your partner’s body. Find 3 different moments where you are both giving each other some of your body weight. How can you lean against each other? Think about not just using your arms – can you lean against each other using your backs? Your sides? Your thighs?

Throw no punches! Did you notice how we knew the dancers were in a struggle, and yet they weren’t lashing out at each other? So think about the intention of your movement, about creating an image of fighting, a tussle – which you have to dance without hurting each other in reality. This requires some skill – be responsible for your own body, but as part of a duet you also have responsibility for your partner’s body. As a dancer, this is really important to remember.

Once you have found your 3 moments of weight bearing, link them up with some transitional movement – eg. breaking away from each other, one dancer shaking the other off, slowly walking around each other to assume a different place...etc.

Ideas for development of these duets:

- There was a simple lift in this duet – can you remember it? What were the elements of it? Close body contact, a slow turn, a supportive cradling of the neck... Can you find a similar lift with your partner and add it to your duet? Keep it simple and safe
- In the piece, this duet ends with both men walking off together after another dance runs past them. Decide how you want to resolve your duet – do you make up after all the struggling against each other? Do you break away and move in opposite directions? Decide what you want to portray

In Your Rooms

‘It’s about a feeling I have....’

‘It’s about miscommunication, a problem we all share. Our pathetic efforts to communicate.’ (Hofesh Shechter, 2007)

Group work - floor

In this piece there is a lot of group work. Did you notice how the dancers managed to stay in perfect time with each other? How do you think they managed to do this?

Can you remember moments in the piece when the dancers were seated on the floor and performed the same movements in unison? Can you recall any of this material?

- Kneeling, hands resting on knees,
- Leaning forward and brushing floor with hands
- Shoulder twitching
- Shaking head
- Touching hips, shoulders, head
- Slapping ear

Use this section as your starting point and in a group of 6 or 7, sit or kneel on the floor and create your own unison section. Maybe start by working in a circle so that you can all see each other as you devise the movement and practice it. Try to find 8 different movements – each one worth one count. Practice dancing it all together.



Ideas for development of this group work:

- Once you have learnt the movement well enough, try putting it on a 'loop' and repeating it
- If you found this easy, try making a further 8 counts and adding it onto what you have made
- Try dancing this material sitting or kneeling in a line facing front, as the dancers did in the piece – does this change the movement, or how you feel when you dance it? Does this change your focus?

- How fast can you perform this material? Perhaps find a good tune with a strong pulse to work with. How do you manage to stay in time with each other? What do you use to do this?
- Can you add another element? Perhaps think about adding a pause or a freeze part way through the sequence, or at the end

Group work – standing

There were a few moments in the piece when the dancers all perform identical movements standing up. Can you recall any of them?

- Standing, shaking arms/fists (one or both) to the beat
- Turning in a circle on one leg, kicking the other leg out to the side
- Side to side step, leaning forward, elbows leading out to the sides
- Jumping lifting knees high, letting arms swing around sides
- Slow motion side to side step, with one fist beckoning in the air – getting faster and faster

In groups of 6 or 7, use these movements as a basis for creating your own group piece. Try to include at least 3 of the elements above, and add your own ideas too. Take time to play around with ideas and give everybody the chance to contribute. Try to agree as a group, which movements you all like the best.

Ideas for development of this group work:

- Practice these movements as a group, using a steady beat to keep time. Try and stay in time with each other. Experiment with how you use the space – do you dance this movement in a huddled group? In a line?
- Think about which direction you face. At certain times the dancers faced upstage, directing their focus and movements to the musicians
- Experiment with this as a group, asking your audience to tell you if it feels different to watch the movement from behind
- Explore the speed of your movement. Elect one member of your group to be the editor and imagine that you are on film. The editor ‘presses’ *fast forward* and *play*, *slow motion* and *pause* on their imaginary remote control (calling out as they do so) to determine how you perform this material

Skins group dance challenge!

Hofesh recently worked on E4’s Skins, choreographing for the second season’s opening episode. Visit <http://www.hofeshtour.co.uk/competition-videos.html> to

see this piece, then create your own Hofesh-Skins style group dance, film it and send us your you-tube link

7. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The company offers workshops and residencies for young people aged 14+ years. For further information contact them directly on info@hofesh.co.uk

Other websites to visit:

www.hofesh.co.uk for further information on the company, interviews with Hofesh, and video & image downloads of his work

www.hofesh tour.co.uk for all up to date information on this UK tour, plus dancers' tour blogs, facebook link, latest reviews and Skins style dance competition

www.dancetouringpartnership.co.uk supporting the company's current UK tour

www.jamd.ac.il/English for information on the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, where Hofesh undertook his early training

www.batsheva.co.il and www.jasminvardimon.com - information about the companies that Hofesh danced with before setting up his own. Hofesh cites Artistic Director, Ohad Naharin as a key influence in his work

www.youtube.com for footage of the company at various performances, in the studio, interviews with Hofesh (for The Culture Show, and CandoCo Dance company for whom he recently created work)

www.theplace.org.uk for information on the Resolution! season, The Place Prize, and the Robin Howard Dance Theatre

www.southbankcentre.co.uk and www.sadlerswells.com
other co-commissioners (see also The Place above) of *In Your Rooms*

www.artscouncil.org.uk the main funder of Hofesh's company

www.jerwood.org funding the live music for the current tour

www.artswales.org.uk contributing funding for the current tour

www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk contributing funding for the current tour

Some interesting reviews:

Following performances at Sadler's Wells

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/oct/07/dance>

For londondance.com

www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=2585 - 26k

Following recent performances at Jacob's Pillow, Massachusetts

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/11/arts/dance/11shec.html>

<http://www.rogovoy.com/news1619.html>

<http://www.iberkshires.com/story/27508/Hofesh-Shechter-Company-Makes-Its-U.S.-Debut-at-Jacob-s-Pillow.html>

These teachers' notes have been written by dance education specialist Lucy Moelwyn-Hughes, in consultation with Hofesh Shechter and Helen Shute.

Photograph credits:

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