

HOFESH SHECHTER

POLITICAL MOTHER



**A RESOURCE PACK FOR
TEACHERS & STUDENTS**

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HOFESH SHECHTER POLITICAL MOTHER

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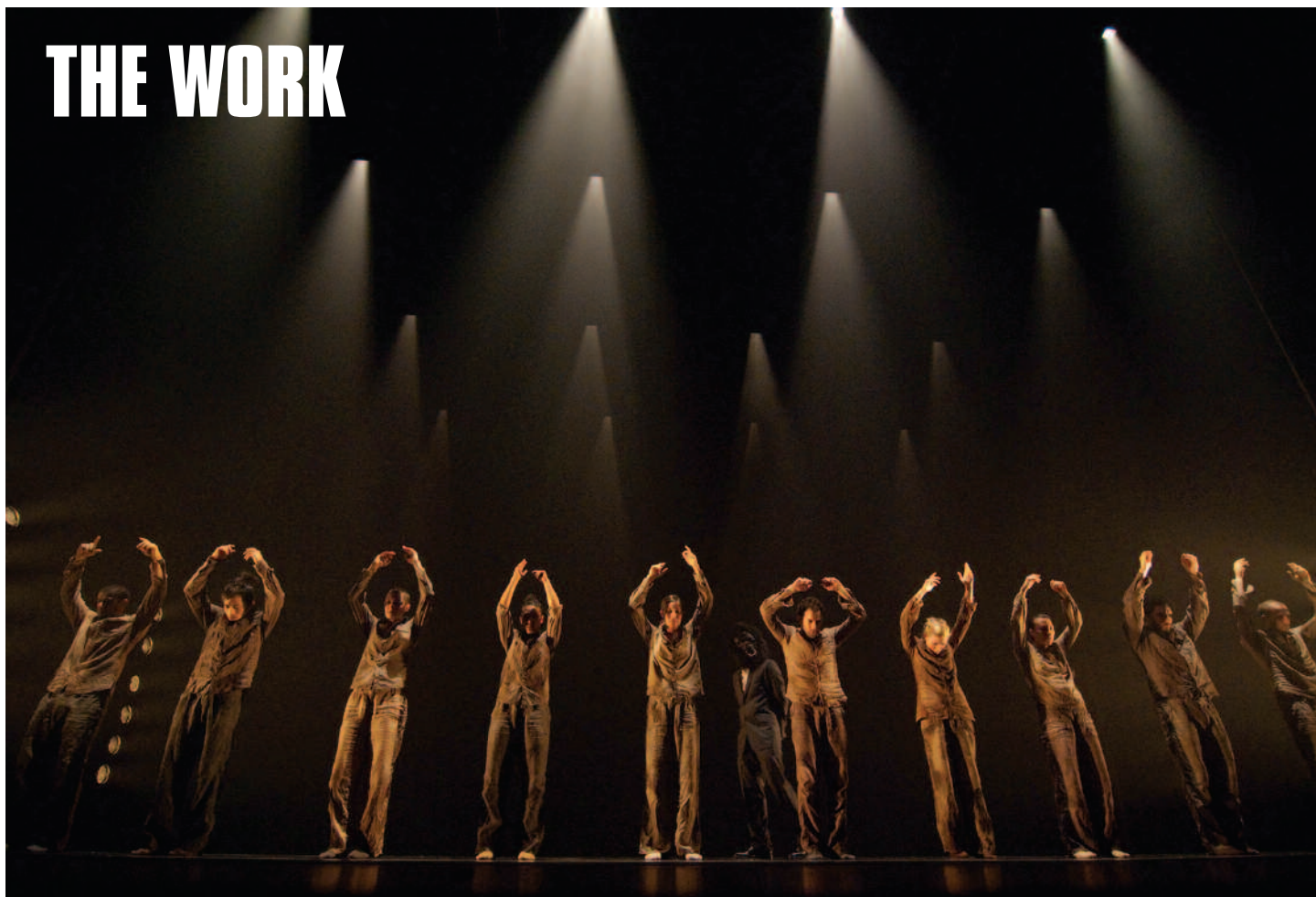
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THE WORK



INITIAL IDEAS & THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS

Political Mother is Hofesh Shechter's first full evening creation for his internationally acclaimed company since the worldwide success of *Uprising/In your rooms*. In an interview exclusively for teachers & students using this resource pack, Hofesh talks about his ideas & starting points for *Political Mother*. Previously Hofesh had a month of research for the work in August 2009, then worked on it again for a month at the beginning of 2010. Intensive rehearsals began in March 2010. This interview took place on day three of these March rehearsals, at Brighton Dome.

"IN POLITICAL MOTHER, SHECHTER RETURNS TO HIS MOST CHARACTERISTIC THEME, PUZZLING OVER THE MECHANISMS OF STATE AND SOCIETY.... SHECHTER DARES US TO RETHINK THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD." JUDITH MACKRELL - THE GUARDIAN, MAY 2010

LUCY Hello Hofesh. Let's talk about your first full-length work...what factors are you having to consider this time around? What does making a full-length piece allow you to do, that your other pieces didn't?

HOFESH Well, this gives me an immediate opportunity for more complexity, more details, more risk ultimately...the story will be longer, with the possibility for more characters, more little stories to unfold. It's a bit of a challenge too, yes. For my previous piece *In your rooms*, I had different movements and fragments inside a single world, but now, for this piece I'm bringing six or seven different worlds together in one piece. We can really explore the different energies and the tension created between these worlds...yes, that gets interesting for me.

L How long do you envisage the piece will last?

H About an hour – if the experience is full and satisfying, that's all it needs to be. And if it's not full and satisfying, well then, I guess I failed...

L Many students find it hard knowing where to start with their own choreographies... how do you start?

H I get most of my interesting ideas on the bus or the tube...so I was hatching ideas even before I knew I would get the opportunity to make this new full-length work.

L Do you keep a notebook of ideas?

H Big notebook. Sometimes writing down the idea is more important for the sake of writing rather than for the purpose of being able to find it later on in the notebook... it's like getting rid of the burden of carrying and remembering all the little ideas. But it's really important to write down things, because so many times you feel you found a really good idea, and the immediate assumption is that you will remember the idea because it's so good. A lot of times that is not true - you can forget an idea totally, remembering only that you had an idea but knowing nothing about what it was. I believe that a very meaningful idea for the work can appear in a millisecond - it is important to 'be there' when that idea arises and to write it down.

I So for *Political Mother*, what were your initial ideas?

■ I started to think about neediness, both in our intimate lives and also in our relationships with our country, the sense of belonging, our nationalism. There is something very needy and quite pathetic about us... I was thinking about these emotional ties – with our parents, mother earth, our founding fathers. As I continued to think about this, the idea of a connection between something political and something warm and cosy seemed impossible. But also very interesting to me. The words political and mother... the title made me smile. These two conflicting worlds.

I That's really interesting. And do you ever get any of your initial ideas from an image?

■ Well I had this image of a tank on stage...as the audience come in it's just, you know...training its gun at us. Yes, I wanted to start the piece with a huge tank on stage. To imply the constant threat, ongoing and absolute, that we are meant to feel...

I That's a pretty clear image! Is there anything else you were thinking about? Any other initial ideas?

■ I was also thinking about warriors – the image of a lone Samurai warrior on the stage. How far would a person go to serve their country? And also servants, to serve, the idea that there is something so servant-like in us all. And dancers – there is something servant-like in dancers too; it dates back to the time of the kings. They are serving the audience, but also satisfying their own needs. So yes, these were all my initial ideas for the piece.

I That is a lot...so...how do you start to organise all of this?

■ When I come to do a piece, I don't come with an answer. I hope to awaken interesting connections for myself. I want to try to create all these different worlds, then edit between them and see what happens...

I What other elements will there be in the piece?

■ I want 5 drummers on stage, and there will be a politician character – shouting, shouting, shouting at the audience, but we don't quite understand what he's saying... There will also be a metal rock band – five electric guitars - on stage, or maybe suspended on a platform... and of course these ten dancers, a sort of miserable group of people whose pathetic-ness is revealed, and they are blindly celebrating at times.

I Do you ever get somebody to look at your work as you are making it, to offer his or her opinion?

■ I do ask for opinions sometimes. I don't always take them or act on them though! What people see in the studio, yes it's one thing, it's ok. Then on stage they see the whole thing with the lights, the sound, the full experience...and they say 'WOW, I never realised it would look like THIS'. So when you watch something in the studio, it's not the full picture yet. But during rehearsals, other people's opinions and questions can be good, they make me explain things out loud, and help me see things I didn't see yet...

“THE PIECE OPENS WITH A SILENT SEARING IMAGE...”
LUKE JENNINGS - THE OBSERVER, MAY 2010

“THIS IS ONE ANGRY PIECE, DELIVERED LIKE A ROAR OF DEFIANCE IN THE FACE OF AN OMNIPOTENT, MALEVOLENT FORCE. IT'S VISCERAL, PAINFUL AND VERY, VERY EXCITING.”
DEBRA CRAINE - THE TIMES, MAY 2010

I The teachers that I've been chatting to about this teachers' pack all said that knowing about your choreographic process was hugely enlightening for them and their students. So...process then. I guess that's hard to define? How would you describe yours? I've heard you say you chuck every single thing that relates to your original idea...onto the stage and then see if it makes you feel anything. You call it a 'chaotic space where you throw every single thing that you've got'. Does this adequately describe your process?

■ Yeah that is more or less it. The main ingredient in my choreographic process is 'trying'. I try this, try that, try something else, try that one we did before again. There is no sense of progress until very late in the process, and the main feeling I need to live with is mostly of daily failure, of not finding it yet... what's important for me is to keep on thinking about it, keep on questioning the work, the ideas, the feelings over and over again. I indeed keep on throwing things in, any image that comes to mind, any thought or idea that appears, write down some strange feelings that may arise, sounds that interest me and throw the thing in new direction. The very act of dealing with the work in a constant way makes a very creative space, a very intense environment.

I Visual patterns – your work is often used by teachers as a great illustration of spacing and group patterning on stage. In a recent rehearsal you drew a diagram for your dancers to explain what you wanted in terms of spacing. Is accurate spacing something you always consider carefully, or is it more organic?

■ I do consider accurate spacing often. It's a very mathematical thing; in a nerdy way the mathematics of the thing can give me a thrill. Then when mixed with the human energy and quality it's a double thrill! The patterns create physical tension between elements and bodies, which has a visual power but also has an emotional contribution to the work. But I don't necessarily plan these patterns at home...though sometimes I do, sit and 'calculate' options. Many times the starting point is some planned moves and shifts in the space, but then there is a spontaneous response to this beginning in the studio when I see it, and then I just keep on going, throwing any spacing idea that comes to mind. Working spontaneously, in a feeling of 'before you can even think', is really important. It taps into places you couldn't tap into through trying hard.

Observing the rehearsals as a fly-on-the-wall in this first week of the creative process, one thing becomes apparent straight away – the huge amount of material that Hofesh has already generated with his company. He is a blur of energy and intensity when he's creating the work. As Jason, one of the dancers puts it, "Hofesh is extremely prolific at creating movement. It just flows out of him. And it's movement that is of real quality. He does this so easily, it seems..."

The ten dancers reassemble after lunch and the afternoon session begins. Hofesh turns his computer on and plays a sound, one long continuous note played on a loop, that will be the soundtrack to this afternoon's rehearsal. It's loud and intense. He kicks off his trainers and starts to build a phrase with the dancers, picking up from where they left it before lunch. He builds the movement a pulse or a step at a time...finding it himself with his own body, then helping the dancers to find it for themselves, often using masses of visual imagery..."It's like celebrating arms but a thickness lower down...like the rest of you is not celebrating at all.." is how he describes a particular gesture and jump, going over and over it together until it feels right. He films everything he makes, darting back and forth to the camera to record.

Whilst this phrase building is happening with Hofesh and one group of dancers, the others have found themselves a different space in the studio to go through another fragment of movement created earlier on. As they power through the movement they use their breath and voices too, "schoooooom da da, vum ah ah boom...". Chris, another of the dancers describes it like this, "To dance his movement, to really be inside it, you often feel like you are singing it. How you get from one part of the stage to another...it's sung somehow. A lot of the information Hofesh gives you, all the breath, the visual imagery, the vocals...it just permeates into you, over time..."

Hofesh is already cleaning and refining movement, even this early on in the process. He spends almost five minutes repeating and watching a five second snatch of movement, breaking it down again, re-adjusting the dancers' focus, all the time talking about their intention, the visual story, getting it just how he wants it...For almost every movement Hofesh seems to have an emotional note for the dancers. When working on a short duet there is a brief embrace between the two dancers, "...just a hug," Hofesh directs, "it's very simple. That's something you are giving him. That's all." Hofesh also works on precision timing from an early stage – maybe this is how his dancers manage to move as one body in their unison sections on stage, perhaps because they have been practicing the timing, and all its nuances, from the very start of the movement being created. "There are lots of people doing variants on the timing in this bit. Come on, let's get this straight... I know it's doing your heads in...mine too..." he says, with a smile.

You could therefore be forgiven for thinking that Hofesh is a hard task-master, driving his company relentlessly, but there is a lightness in the studio too, a sense of humour, play and discovery between Hofesh and the dancers. In a short break where they stretch, pop to the loo, take a drink, they start laughing about the words for animal noises, in all their various languages. One gets the impression that it's a relaxed and content group of people, happy in each other's company.

"THERE IS A GENERAL SENSE OF NEEDINESS INSIDE THE PIECE...A NEED TO SATISFY, A NEED TO SERVE, TO BE LOVED AND TO BE ACCEPTED."
HOFESH SHECHTER, MAY 2010



Hofesh rehearsing Chris & Sita

LUCY You're quite funny with the dancers, it's a nice atmosphere to be part of...is this because it's so early on in the process? Or do you try and maintain your sense of humour right up to those final pressure-filled days?

HOFESH Sense of humour and lightness are very important when you have a hefty task ahead of you... It balances the potential heaviness that can and sometimes will develop in a long working period, but also the humour puts us in a place of perspective on what we do, we can't take ourselves too seriously. Taking things too seriously is normally when you actually lose touch with reality and can dive into your own miserable version of reality... humour is perspective.

I I've noticed a huge attention to detail in your early rehearsals, refining and re-refining movement in absolute detail. Is this how you always work? Do you ever let material slip a little, or do you like to tease it out right from the outset?

I The movement material you use for a dance piece is the very basic material the work will be made of, it is the work in the very simplistic sense of things, so for it to be as coherent and focused as possible is very important for me. It's really like cooking - if you have fresh tasty ingredients then making a tasty meal is easier. It's good to invest your energy early on in getting these fresh ingredients of the best possible quality.

I You appear to have a huge output – already in week one there is a lot of material, all of which you film. How much of this early material gets chucked out? Do you use it as a bank of phrases to dip into? Or perhaps as inspiration if you get a block?

I We create a lot of material - I don't see that as a sign of creativity necessarily... it's more that it takes time for me to feel that the material is useful and connected to the work. It is repetitive failure to find that coherency and focus and it is my stubborn nature that is ready to push to try again, and again, and again... About 80% of what we work on in the studio is chucked away.

I Finally, do you ever have doubts when you make work? That you won't make what you originally envisage...that, even with your strong starting images & ideas, the piece turns out not quite 'right' for you? Has anyone ever given you useful advice on this?

I Well, before I started creating this piece, I was sitting at home one day just feeling weighed down by it all, like ...what am I doing here? Not quite knowing where I'm going to start actually. And I thought what should I do? How can I do this? Then Helen said to me, "You just have to make something that resonates..." and I thought, well yes, I can certainly live with that.

FROM FIRST IDEAS TO PREMIERE – THE TIMESCALE OF MAKING A PIECE



Making a full-length work certainly means a longer rehearsal period for Hofesh and his collaborators, one of whom is Merle Hensel, the costume designer for *Political Mother*. Here during rehearsals at Brighton Dome, she gives us an insight into the timescale of this process from her perspective.

LUCY Hi Merle. Is this the first time you have collaborated with Hofesh?

MERLE Yes it is.

L How did he find you? Or perhaps how did you find him?
Who approached whom?

M Another costume designer who I had worked with on a Complicite (www.complicite.org) project recommended me and Helen got in touch with me. I then met with Hofesh and showed him my portfolio, and he asked me if I wanted to design the costumes for his new piece.

L How much do you & Hofesh talk beforehand - does he have a clear idea of what he wants the dancers to be wearing already? Or does he talk to you about his ideas for the piece then leave you to find your own 'way in' to the costume design, from a blank page as it were?

M We had an initial talk, when he was in the studio with the dancers during their research and development time, where he told me the general concept of the piece, what sort of characters it is about. I then went off to collect a lot of images and ideas, which I showed him. Together we started identifying a bit more closely which direction to take. We are developing costume ideas parallel to him developing the piece, which is a great way of working. It ensures that the costumes really fit his work.

L I visited rehearsals in the first week of March and there was already a rail of clothes in the studio, as well as a prototype Samurai warrior's suit of armour. So presumably you've already been doing a lot of work on this piece before the dancers even get into the studio?

M I brought quite a lot of rehearsal costumes early in the process, so that he could play around with them a bit and see what works. It is also good for the dancers to get a feel for the characters. The samurai costumes are the most challenging in this design. First there are the practicalities, how do you fake incredibly heavy metal armour, how do you make it so the dancers can still move in it. Which part of the armour do you choose for the costume, they have to be able to change into it very quickly, so we cannot use the full armour samurais wore, it consisted of lots and lots of different armour pieces. I thought thick leather would be the best

solution; it looks solid, but is still surprisingly flexible, especially when the armour is made out of strips tied together. It is also still quite light. However I wanted to try it out as early as possible, so I made a trial version out of cardboard with leatherette glued onto it. I actually started working on this piece of costume after the first meeting with Hofesh.

L So, what is the time frame for the costume design for this piece? When was your first contact with Hofesh for example?

M I first met him at the end of January this year. I took my portfolio for him to see, and we discussed his early ideas for the piece and what he was aiming for with the costumes. I went away and started some research and thinking. We then met again in mid February when we looked at the research and worked more on ideas.

L And when will you be 'signed off'? At the premiere? Or do you perhaps stay connected to the piece for longer to see how the costumes work out/trouble shoot any problems with wear & tear etc?

M No, I'll be 'signed off' at the premiere. I will by then have worked out and adapted what needs changing, as the dancers will be dancing the piece in costume through the production weeks.

L Are you making everything from scratch for *Political Mother* or do you buy/source clothes too?

M There are too many costumes to make everything from scratch within the budget, especially with having the samurai costumes made. There are 37 costumes in all. So we will have some things made and buy others and alter/dye them, break them down etc.

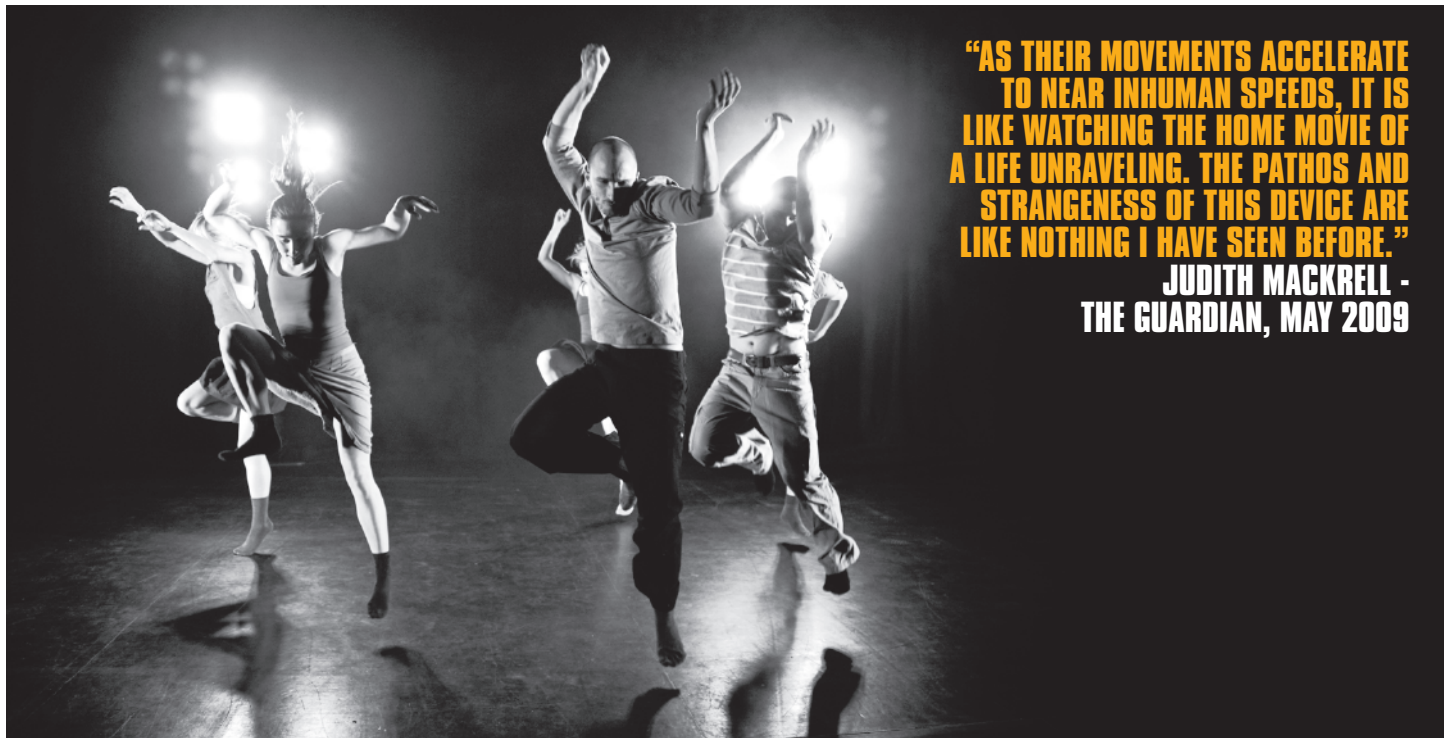
L Hofesh often favours a dark & shadowy lighting design with blasts of fierce & bright light. Do his thoughts for lighting feature quite early in your conversations together? In other words how much does your costume design need to take into account what he has in mind for the lighting design?

M Good point, he hasn't talked to me about this yet, as the lighting designer comes to collaborate a little later on in the process. I might just ask him about that next time we talk!

THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF THE WORK

MOVEMENT

Hofesh's movement style has been described as many things...not least something that is hard to define. Certainly it is underivative of anything you are likely to see on a British stage and this makes it extremely engaging...that sense that you've not seen any movement like his before. When asked about his style and the notion of making unique movement, Hofesh's response is typically humble. He says, "I do not feel unique. At all. In fact I am well aware of the borrowing I am making in each and every moment. I can see the connection between everything I do and everything I know and remember, so that takes away any sense of uniqueness - it does give a strong sense of connection though, of linking things." So how does he find dancers to work with him? What is he looking for when he auditions people? His answer is both simple and revealing, "A strong sense of humility, alongside their talent..."



"AS THEIR MOVEMENTS ACCELERATE TO NEAR INHUMAN SPEEDS, IT IS LIKE WATCHING THE HOME MOVIE OF A LIFE UNRAVELING. THE PATHOS AND STRANGENESS OF THIS DEVICE ARE LIKE NOTHING I HAVE SEEN BEFORE."

**JUDITH MACKRELL -
THE GUARDIAN, MAY 2009**

Here we chat with some of these dancers - Jason, Chris, Hannah and Sita – and discuss his style of movement.

LUCY Let's talk about Hofesh's style...any thoughts?

SITA Hofesh's movements are coming from an honest and simple point, physically, emotionally and mentally. The more open, calm and confident you are, the closer you get to the energy he would like to work with. For me, it is more about energy than a specific style. Anyone could understand and try it.

JASON I think the easiest way to describe his 'style' is to describe how it feels to dance it...it's a total body experience in the sense that there is an awareness throughout the body, often with two very different sensations occurring at the same time. For example he might ask you to find a sense of thick stringy arms with a very relaxed lower body. Hofesh uses a lot of visualisation to help us find these qualities. So in fewer words...I'd say his style is continuous and full-bodied.

HANNAH His style is very hard to describe, in my opinion there are so many elements that form Hofesh's work/style. I think to dance and perform Hofesh's work you definitely need to be connected to the right emotion and feeling at the right time... When he first creates the movement with you, yes you do need to repeat it for it to settle with you physically, but then in order to really understand it you have to connect to something from within, whatever that may be for you.

CHRIS Hmm...his style...I would describe it as percussive, extremely articulate. There's something about it not being the movement that attracts your eye, but the people moving. Also so much of his work is based on imagery, that for me his style feels quite cinematic. For example the small flick of a wrist...then nine people do it, it amplifies that movement, like a camera zooming in for a close up. I approach his work, his style...as a person rather than as a dancer.

L And how about comparisons with other choreographers?

C I'm aware of Hofesh's connections to Ohad Naharin's Batsheva/Gaga technique, although I've never spent a lot of time exploring how different or similar they really are. Since I've learned to understand my body almost entirely through Hofesh's technique, it makes it difficult to compare and look outside of the uniqueness of my experience. What makes Hofesh's work so unique for me is that it comes from one person's anatomy, and that person thinks more about story telling than technique. It's also Hofesh who creates the music we dance to, so everything feels like it comes from its original source. Nothing seems to be questioned in the work because it's just one person who is conjuring up the whole atmosphere. Since I like this atmosphere so much, I find working with Hofesh a very rewarding and unique experience.

S Every choreographer has something special. I think that there is not much point in comparing. Either you like it, or you don't and so you can leave!

“THE CHOREOGRAPHY IS FILLED WITH IMAGES OF OBEISANCE AND SURRENDER, OF PRIMITIVISM, ANIMALISM AND MASS MELTDOWN, OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT AND THE DRIVE OF OUTRIGHT REBELLION.”

DEBRA CRAINE - THE TIMES, MAY 2010

- I** Jason, I've heard you all refer to certain phrases and sections by name. Just now you were working on 'the Brad Pitt phrase'...can you tell me a bit about that?!
- J** Well this came from a visual reference. As Hofesh was teaching us this phrase and helping us find the essence of it, he said "Have you seen Fight Club?" He wanted us to find something of that atmosphere, of the Brad Pitt character in that film. So it is a visual reference for a step or a phrase that sort of sticks. It helps to signpost movements like this, as you are generating so much material to find the 'worlds' that Hofesh wants to create in his work.
- I** Chris, tell us a bit about these 'worlds' that Jason mentions. Perhaps they define Hofesh's 'style' as a choreographer...?
- C** Ok, well Hofesh can generate movement really quickly, and there is always music/sound from an early stage, even if it's not what will be used in the final piece. As well as the movement he makes, we also improvise a great deal for him and with him; to find the worlds and atmospheres he's looking for in his pieces. He gives each 'world' a name. For this piece, we've worked on 'the showman' – trying to find movement that's about ego, the desire to perform...but that's also insecure, needy and a bit selfish. We've explored another world - 'the prisoner'. We started off with images and movements of exhaustion and beaten down acceptance. Then the more Hofesh watched and explored with us, the more he wanted to change this world, this atmosphere... into something that showed a kind of sucked-in weakness, teamed with a sense that we were blindly following one another. We also played and improvised to find a world he described as 'Twisted, caged animal'. In this world he asked us to try and get to that dumb feeling that connects us all, the tunnel vision and pack mentality that animals, including us humans, can show when under pressure. Does that make sense?
- I** Yes! That gives us a real insight into his process, as well as his style. It must be so interesting to learn about yourself as a performer, and as a human being when you're working on these improvisations?
- C** Absolutely. I think I find it easy to connect with his work and the flavours and worlds he creates, because I'm a little rough around the edges, a little less technically excellent. I find that being with someone who is so into the work he's creating...it just rubs off on you and brings out the very best of your imagination and creative abilities.

See hofesh.co.uk for images and excerpts of the work.

“THE MOVEMENT...IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE SHAPES YOU SEE ON STAGE. THESE SHAPES ARE A TRANSLATION OF A FEELING. WHEN SOMEONE WATCHES THEM, IT TRANSLATES BACK TO A FEELING.”

HOFESH SHECHTER - MAY 2010

MUSIC

Hofesh is rather unusual as a choreographer, in that he creates the music for his work as well as the movement. His training and career as a musician have been well documented. For *Political Mother* he has assembled a band of 8 musicians – guitarists and percussionists. A big sound.

Here, during their third week of rehearsals with the company, we meet Lead Percussionist Yaron Engler, and guitarist Joel Harries, and ask them about their history with Hofesh, and the process of making music for *Political Mother*.

“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 EXOTIC ORGANISM AND SOUNDED LIKE A FLINTIER MASSIVE ATTACK.”
MARK MONAHAN - TELEGRAPH ONLINE, MARCH 2009

LUCY Yaron, can you tell me how long you've known Hofesh? How much have you worked together?

YARON I first met Hofesh in Israel around 1998. He was studying drums with the same teacher I was with. We started to talk one day – we had a really good connection, we were into the same stuff. He sort of opened up my vision a little, because as a dancer he came from a different world. I realised that you didn't just have to make music for music's sake - that there was a place for music alongside other art forms. Hofesh arrived in London in 2004 while I was living in Barcelona and I've worked with him on and off ever since that time.

I How do you see the role of your music in his work?

Y For me I see the music as the underlying support, sometimes it can drive the action, sometimes it responds to the action, it's always there... If you think of the whole piece in layers, then for me, dance is in the centre, and the next layer, the secondary layer that surrounds the centre, is the music. The drums in particular I see as an instrument of support. Working for Hofesh is great although it's not always so easy! He works on the visuals and the music at the same time, there is so much going on for him. So I'm looking to help, to offer the underlying support with the music...

I How do you think the two disciplines differ?

Y The counting – it's so different. The patterns and the way you count in dance are totally different to how you count as a musician. Well, how I do anyway! So that's something you have to get your head around quite quickly... also the concept of learning the materials and the way rehearsals work. Dancers learn very long phrases in a very short time. It always amazes me as a musician. For dancers, most of the work is in the group during rehearsals while for musicians most of the work is "homework".

I Let's talk about *Political Mother*. How much information does Hofesh give you about the piece, Joel?

JOEL Not a lot! But it's early days still, I guess...

Y Yes...working with Hofesh you get used to this atmosphere of controlled chaos. It's all there in his head, but he doesn't need to give you the full picture. It's easier in a way, so you don't worry about the big final product, you're instead concentrating on the section of rhythm you're working on that day.



“MUSIC IS THE REASON I DO DANCE. THAT’S IT. I LOVE THE FEELING WHEN MUSIC IS PLAYED IN A THEATRE. IT JUST GIVES ME A THRILL...IT CAN CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE, IT CAN CREATE RULES, IT CAN CREATE THOUGHTS. IT CAN TAKE YOU SOMEWHERE IN A SPLIT SECOND.” HOFESH SHECHTER - MAY 2010

J I’m so interested to see how it all comes together. So far I’ve not seen any of the dancers’ work.

Y Like I said...controlled chaos.

I What have you been working on today?

J Lots of loud guitars...

Y ...and a snare drum marching thing. Also two softer sections.

I How will the sections you’ve been working on today, fit into the overall process? How does Hofesh start to piece things together?

Y The musicians are here making this sound, the dancers are in another space working on the movement...anyone looking in to the process would think...what’s going on here? I’ve worked with Hofesh a long time now, so I know he needs to allow time and space for the whole piece to come together. When we are all together towards the end of the rehearsal period, the inspiration flows for him and it all comes together.

I Joel, as a relative newcomer to the Hofesh Shechter Company, how would you describe the experience?

J It’s a great company to work with. I’m really happy to have this job!

I Will the final version of music for *Political Mother* be written down? Do you write a score for yourself and the band?

Y Yes, I write it down...it’s going to be a long piece compared with the others, so we’ll need a record of what we are playing. But I’m more interested in connecting – that’s where the music flows. We’re connecting with the dancers, with the movement, we’re responding. I like working with musicians that can connect – that’s the key for me. Joel is great, because he’s looking to connect...not just to play. It’s why Hofesh asked him to join us.

I How much does Hofesh allow the music to evolve over the course of a tour?

Y Hofesh is great, because he’s also got a musician’s mind, he let’s us play...let’s the music settle into something, and also evolve. He understands that this will happen. I ask him a lot though...“This part changed, is that ok?” During the last tour the music for *In your rooms* changed a lot. It’s interesting to see what happens to a piece of music repeated over a long period of time.

COSTUME

Merle Hensel designed the costumes for *Political Mother*. Here we talk to her about her work.

LUCY Hello Merle, can you tell us a little about your starting points for the costume design for this piece?

MERLE Well, Hofesh discussed with me the idea of these different groups of people in society, and them being defined by their costume as well as their movement. So we have the Samurai warriors, the losers, and the entertainers. These groups inhabit different worlds. The warriors are defined by their armour. The losers, they are quite an homogenous group, only different from each other in small details – a different shade of brown here, a collar there. Very subtle. They are perceived as the bottom of society – prisoners, labourers, beggars.

The entertainers are more colourful in their costume. For this design we looked at the circuses of Eastern Europe, the travelling gypsies of Northern Africa, the flapper dresses of the 1920’s. This group are more individual, I’m using more colour in their costumes. Finally the musicians’ costumes – the rock band, we were going for an anarchist look, coming out of the 1980’s music scene. And the drummers, they are the complete opposite – military looking, very straight and serious.

I I’m talking to you now, on the day of the dress rehearsal, as you are sitting here in a dressing room making final alterations to costumes and rehearsal costumes. So you have finished the design now. Are you happy with the overall results?

M Yes I think the concept has worked well. It has actually changed and developed, as all designs do...The differences in costumes were originally much more subtle, but they have evolved into slightly more obvious differences. That seems to work better.

“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 AROUND THEIR ANKLES.”
JUDITH MACKRELL - THE GUARDIAN, MAY 2010



I You work for the stage and also in film - what differences are there between the two disciplines? Have you had to approach the costume design for *Political Mother* differently to your work in film?

M Designing for the stage and for film is quite different. Film is usually very naturalistic, apart from fantasy/science fiction maybe. You need to be extremely accurate both in the period/social research as well as in the making of the costumes. We tend to want films and their characters to feel real. Also the camera sees everything since it can show you extreme close-ups. On stage you can create more stylized and abstract design since theatre - dance even more so, is much more abstract as an art form. You can give the performers realistic clothes, but you can also put them in strange, completely unnaturalistic costumes and no one will question it. In film that very rarely works, it can very easily look fake and slightly amateurish. Also on stage a lot of detail gets lost due to the distance between the performers and the audience, so I need to work with that in mind. You might do a beautifully designed, intricately made and detailed costume which then looks bland on stage, because what made the costume beautiful, the detailing, gets lost. So you have to paint in broader strokes, work with the silhouette, create more extreme body shapes, age things more etc.

I Do you have a favoured palette of colour for the stage? Your 'signature' style perhaps?

M I tend not to use bright colours, if I do use strong colours it is more in small bits, to accentuate things, like highlights almost. The colour palette usually depends on the colours of the set, but I do find myself using a lot of blues/greens/greys/browns. Since I mostly design the set as well, I can work with colour on the overall picture.

When I have costumes made I like to use the same fabric for elements in all the costumes. Or if the piece is about different

groups of people I might use one fabric for parts of the costume of everybody in that group and mix it with other bits, so that the unifying effect is not too obvious.

I like doing costumes that are neither period nor exactly current, timeless almost (well still within the 20th/21st century). I love the 50's style, so a lot of cuts in my costumes are based in that time.

I Are there certain colours that get bleached out on stage and that you therefore just never use?

M No, it depends on the effect you want to create, sometimes you want exactly that bleached effect.

I Does designing costumes for extremely physical work like Hofesh's, limit you in any way as far as costume design goes? Or is it the opposite?

M Designing costumes for extremely physical work requires different costumes than for theatre work, but I don't find this limiting. It's just a specific way of working, one works with the shape of the body in movement. Also a lot of the time it requires design that is more stylized, less naturalistic which suits my style anyway.

I How important is it for you to be in the studio as the work is created? Does the development of the movement itself or the dancers themselves influence your design?

M It is important to see the dancers, how they move, how they look. It of course helps to get a feel for the piece, the quality of movement, the rhythm, to hear the music, to be inspired. I don't have to be in rehearsal constantly, but it is important to see the development of the piece and include this in the costumes.

I So a final word on your costume design for *Political Mother*. Are you pleased with how it all looks on stage under the lights?

M Yes, I'm very pleased. I think it's looking good...

LIGHTING

Political Mother will be the fifth piece that Lighting Designer Lee Curran has collaborated with Hofesh on. Having worked for a decade with choreographers and dance companies, Lee is often in demand and juggles these commitments with his other job as Technical Director at London's ICA (www.ica.org.uk).

Watching Lee work throughout the dress rehearsal day, up and down ladders adjusting lanterns, chatting with a musician about where to stand under a spotlight, working with the technical crew at the theatre, he seems to second guess Hofesh. It looks like a very honest and productive working relationship. Lets find out more about this.



**'LEE CURRAN'S EXTRAORDINARY
LIGHTING DESIGN SHATTERS THE GLOOM.'**
WILLIAM MCEVOY, THE STAGE MAY 2010

LUCY Hello Lee. How does your collaboration with Hofesh work? Does he ask for you to create atmospheres/environments that he has a clear idea of, or do you see the work, maybe a run first, and then make suggestions? Is this a chicken and egg question?

LEE Generally, we'll meet up early in the making of the work and discuss the concepts involved. Hofesh will usually have ideas, which are sometimes very specific and sometimes more general feelings and atmospheres. The music plays an important part in this discussion as well. I'll have some immediate thoughts, and talk them through with Hofesh to get a better idea of what he's thinking. That way I can start to figure out the aesthetics of the piece. It's then quite a circular process of feeding in ideas as the piece is made, considering every element of the production as it develops, and making sure you have a coherent whole. I'm always very conscious of the dynamics and structure of the lighting design, thinking of it a bit like a musical score.

L And how about these 'worlds' that Hofesh and the dancers have spoken about. How much do they have an influence on what you are creating for the piece? Are they a starting point for you?

LEE We talked a bit about these concepts in our initial meeting and referred to them occasionally when I came to see rehearsals. One of the aspects of Hofesh's work that I enjoy is the way it suggests a narrative or subject without being too specific or literal about it. I try to let these ideas inform the overall lighting design in the same way – suggestion rather than specificity. Then you can take the literal approach for moments of counterpoint or emphasis or playfulness... Again, for me it's part of the dynamics of the design.

L For *Political Mother* was there any specific research you needed to do before you started to work on the design? In other words do you arrive at the production week with a blank page, ready to get inspired on the spot, or do you get prepared in some way beforehand?

LEE I arrive at the initial meeting with a blank page. After that it depends. I can take inspiration from anywhere, but I tend to get it from observation over time rather than research for a particular project. That might mean I read books about design and architecture, and go to see an artist's work at a gallery, but it might also be watching sunlight on a surface, a shop window display, a description in a book... From observation, ideas form and percolate, waiting for the right design and the right moment.

In practical terms, this all happens well before production week. I have to produce a plan in time for our production manager to organise the lighting rig, usually at least a week in advance of the get-in. It doesn't mean it won't change during production week (or after) – quite the opposite – but the lighting rig is usually the first thing that needs to be put in place, so you can't turn up at the venue unprepared.

**"LEE CURRAN'S LIGHTING ILLUMINATES THE DARKNESS
IN DISCRETE SHAFTS. NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE SEEN.
FOG FLOATS IN THE BACKGROUND, INTENSIFYING THE
FURTIVENESS." CHARLES MCNULTY -
L.A. TIMES, OCTOBER 2009**

THE END OF THE PROCESS

Over the weeks of the rehearsal period as sections grow, there seems to be a vast amount of movement. Hofesh doesn't tend to spend hours and hours in one place; he moves between phrases and sections, keeping the energy in the room up. He remains clear about his goals for that day, or even that half an hour. "Ok, let's work on the 'Losers' part for five more minutes. Do it as cleanly as possible then we'll let it go. We'll take a five minute break then onto something completely different." In the break that follows whilst the dancers stretch and take a drink, Hofesh chats with Bruno the rehearsal director about another section. He asks Bruno to tidy and clarify it in the last half an hour of the day, whilst Hofesh has to rush off to meet with one of his collaborators. The atmosphere in the studio is that of hard work, of focus. But it isn't unhappy, there is still banter. Infact Bruno lets the dancers go ten minutes early that afternoon.

At this stage in the creative process, it would be interesting to know how much of the whole piece the dancers are aware of, or whether it remains in Hofesh's vision rather than theirs. One of his dancers Sita explains, "Hofesh tends to get clear on the final piece much later on in the rehearsals so there isn't so much point in asking him again and again for information. The full picture emerges in those last few weeks. He still gets lots of ideas late into the process through watching us, and I think he leaves as many decisions as he can until as late as he can. We did a *Political Mother* research week last summer (August 2009) where he played with a few ideas. There was more time and space then to ask questions about his ideas for the piece. If you ask him questions about it now, today, sure he'll chat...but I prefer not to. He knows what he's doing and I don't need to know everything right now!"



The day of the dress rehearsal and energy in the theatre is high. After a short warm up class, Hofesh jumps up on stage to go through notes made on his iPhone from the run throughs the previous day. The dancers listen and work on phrases that Hofesh wants to look at. He asks them to work through one phrase they refer to as 'Tappers'. "Let that rattle be contained," he asks as he dances it with them, "if you let it go too much it becomes too linear and we loose the vibration." After this has been worked through a few times they move on. "Losers' line – let's have a little refresh..." Hofesh suggests. Amidst the hard work, there is still much time for lightness and humour, Hofesh making the company laugh with his South Park impressions.

There is much to do behind the scenes too, Nat the company Stage Manager keeps the dancers informed about where they need to be, when their breaks will be, where their costumes are and so on. Meanwhile Emily has coordinated a press photo shoot, and all the collaborators are in for final work too. As Helen sits in the auditorium she observes that the piece and the company are in a really good place..."due perhaps in part to everyone's utter attention to detail through the creation period," she wonders. "For example" she continues, "Hofesh even considers the type of vocal cues the performers work with. In rehearsal the other day he changed a vocal cue from a shushing sound to more of a 'huh' sound – he wanted it to be much more abrupt. Something that would have total relevance to the movement at that point in the piece." All in all the focus and depth of attention to detail is impressive during such a busy day. And so it continues in the final count down to the premiere.

We catch up with Hofesh the morning after the premiere of *Political Mother* – truly the end of the creation period...though surely the beginning of the next phase of life for this piece of work.

LUCY Hofesh, congratulations on an extraordinary work. How are you, on the other side of the premiere? Wrecked/relieved/energised? All of the above?

HOFESH First I was just relieved, I didn't really care even how it was, but only that it 'was', and not 'going to be'... The sense of being behind me simply meant there is nothing I can do anymore to make it better and that is in a twisted way, a relief. Otherwise now I have few days off and to be honest I am just trying to forget about it all - I will deal with the work when I meet the dancers again in rehearsals and on the tour.

I Were you happy with the premiere (which received a standing ovation) and Friday evening too? How did the 2 evenings compare?

■ The premiere was very nervy, energies were high, which I am not sure is good for the work but I sort of accept it's going to be like that on premiere night. But I didn't feel personally that I could really 'see' the work on the premiere, I was too preoccupied with technical details. The second night was more focused and personally I had a much richer experience emotionally when watching the piece.

I "*Political Mother* ...as ambitious and exhilarating as modern dance gets...". Quite a stellar review! Does this feel good, or have you had so many great reviews over the years now that you feel less about them? You've said in the past that you read all your reviews. Do you still do this?

■ I do read the reviews. I don't want to, but I'm too curious... it can make me feel good for a moment, but it's important to remember you are reading one person's experience of the work- the work itself even is not a solid thing, it's a live event that can be unbelievable one evening and awful the other. It's important for me to read reviews with flexibility and perspective.

I The day before the premiere the mood of the company seemed very buoyant...great morale amongst the performers and your collaborators. It all felt quite calm. This has never been my regular experience of these days! Is it always this way for you, or was it unusual? Symbolic of the work being in a good place maybe?

■ We were technically in a very healthy place. Having had previews meant we 'knew what we're doing'. I think that gave a breeze of confidence to the guys.

I That day, you were so accommodating with the press. You even had time to welcome your wardrobe assistant. It's impressive, on a day that's so busy and potentially stressful. I've observed over these past months that you seem to take a lot of care with the people you work with. Do you feel this as an added pressure, to try to keep everyone happy and productive...something you do consciously...or are you just naturally a very considerate employer?

■ The relationships I have with the people I work with are all I've got, that's what my life consists of. Anything that is really important has only to do with the way we interact and treat each other - and that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to be super nice and keep each other happy all the time - we can challenge each other and try to progress and improve, but the underlying motivation for me must be the well-being and development of myself together with the people around me. If that didn't happen I would feel confused about what I'm doing.

I Apart from the notes and a bit of spacing & clarifying in the afternoon, did you offer the performers any last minute words of wisdom before curtain up? Do you 'do a Madonna' and get everyone to hold hands and commune? Do you feel the need to gather your company and say something before you go the other side of the stage? Or do you prefer to let them be?

■ I do try to gather the company but very subtly, bring the energies of all together focused to the same direction. It can just be a little chat of 'remember... blah blah', or 'just enjoy yourselves... blah blah...' it depends on what I feel the group needs on the night in order to focus. Sometimes I just let them be...

I *Political Mother*, and *Where there is pressure there is folkdance*. You've literally put the writing on the wall for the audience. What was your process here – gut instinct or careful consideration?

■ Someone told me about that sentence, that is the creation of an artist named FOS - he made it out of neon in a sort of sculptured way. I loved the sentence and felt that in a way it really brings the work together, it gives a powerful resonating feeling to the elements in the work and I enjoy that feeling that it gives.

I In the past you have said that you don't want your audience to remain emotionally uninvolved with your work...that you want them to be bubbling with questions. Well, mission accomplished I guess! Do you ever have people clamouring to discuss the work with you after seeing a show? Your work seems to bring out quite extreme reactions from your audience. Do they ever feel the need to share that with you, to search you out and talk with you?

■ Yes, a lot of times that happens. I think people feel like I might be the best person to process the thing with because it's my work. I think they are wrong - my presence will add nothing good to their processing of the work...what they process is the way they experienced the work, not the work itself. Everything they felt and thought of are things inside themselves, and to be honest I think the best way to process any of that is not through words but through contemplation.

I The very last section, the reversing...it felt like you were offering something to us – hope, or perhaps something near to an answer. You also did something similar in *The Art of Not Looking Back*. Is this something that interests you – the notion of resolution? In other words, has this been a conscious development in your work?

■ I loved it in *The Art of Not Looking Back* and it is a very useful device artistically and emotionally. It fitted *Political Mother* very well and I felt OK to use it again, firstly because it's just OK, and also because the former piece didn't get much exposure and I felt it would be great to expose this device to more people.

I The Joni Mitchell song at the end when the house lights come up and we're all sitting there with each other, it feels extremely communal... and it seems to allow for an emotional response, to give us permission to absorb, reflect and feel. Is it your intention to give the audience some space here? A kind of buffer between what we've all just witnessed, and the reality of the performers coming out of character and taking their bows?

■ Exactly. What you said.

SECTIONS BREAKDOWN

Currently there are no plans to release a DVD of the full piece for study. However, in this section you can study 2 selected excerpts in depth using the short clips that you can watch or download at www.politicalmother.co.uk/education.html



SECTION 1 FOR STUDY BREAKDOWN

WATCH CLIP 1

Extract length: 3 minutes 15 seconds

Insight from Hofesh on this section:

“...that’s Jason’s lost identity just right there...”

Visual setting: things to consider

- What atmosphere is created on stage through the lighting?
- Describe some of the differences in lighting states that occur in this extract
- Costume – who is now on stage? Losers? Entertainers? Refer back to Merle’s insights on page 9. The different elements of the work for information about how these 2 different groups are clothed.
- Note how Jason is lit
- Note how the musicians are lit

Aural setting: things to consider

- How many musicians on stage? What sound are they creating?
- Does it change through the course of this extract?
- Is there any recorded music?
- Any vocals?

Movement content: things to consider

- Note Jason, the first dancer we see staggering onto stage right at the beginning of this clip, watch his movement closely and describe it
- Try to find a tone, an emotion you think his movement conveys
- Note the entrances and exits of the other dancers – how is their movement different to Jason’s?

Themes

For Hofesh, this is about Jason’s life/sanity falling apart right in front of our eyes.

- What is the significance of the other characters we see? Raging politician/rock star? Rocking/shaking man also up on the higher platform? The couple?

SECTION 2 FOR STUDY BREAKDOWN

WATCH CLIP 2

Extract length: 6 minutes

Insight from Hofesh on this section:

“We call it Solaris, based on the piece of music sampled at the back (little bits of violins) from the film Solaris.”

Visual setting: things to consider

- Describe the top lighting from the rig. What does it do to the stage? How does it make the dancers look?
- A statement is revealed – how and where?
- Costumes – losers/entertainers? Something else?

Aural setting: things to consider

- Music – recorded or live?
- Musicians on stage? Any vocals?
- Atmosphere created by the sound?
- Music as a starting point – what themes emerge in the soundtrack?

Movement content: things to consider

- How do the dancers start to move?
- Groupings? Observing one another?
- Any key elements in their movement that emerge in repetition? Reference to previous movement motifs?
- A more central role for any of the dancers?

Themes

- Significance of the statement we read?
- Presented to us gradually – any reason for this?
- Dancers clothed differently – how do you read this?

IDEAS FOR WARMING UP AND CREATIVE TASKS

WARMING UP THROUGH IMPROVISATION

First a thought from Hofesh for teachers and students wishing to explore warming up and getting creative in the way he often does with the company.

“We start by being very soft and quiet with the floor. Starting with the feet and then up through the rest of the body. That doesn’t necessarily mean they have to move very loosely and airily, but really only that - that their movement is absolutely quiet and there is a sense of connecting with the floor very softly. That can actually produce very powerful movements, including speed and ‘drive.’”

Here are a few things to try, in the words of some of the dancers. First, we’ll hear from Chris: Finding the Hofesh ‘flow’ comes a lot from improvisation. Usually from the feet. Try imagining that instead of two feet you have a ball on the end of each leg. Using all edges and sides of the feet with the floor. Seeing how this effects the knees, then the hips going upwards through the body. To learn from the hands is one of my best doorways into Hofesh’s work. It’s the most articulate part of the body, dancer or not. Simply translating that intelligence, or imagining your movements are “puppeteered” by the hands.

LUCY Chris, can you give an example of a choreographic task that Hofesh has given you?

CHRIS I can think of a good one, though it may be tough to explain.

It works best with three people or more. One person starts a movement (nothing too complex, maybe lasting two or three counts). This person then repeats that movement so that everyone else can learn how it moves and what rhythm it is. Once everyone knows what is going to happen, they close in around the mover. The mover continues to repeat the movement (a little more slowly so as not to hit anyone) and the other dancers begin responding in any way to the initial movement.

The aim is that everyone in the group responds to the stimulus of one person. For example, as the other dancers close in around the mover, someone might find that they are directly in the way of the movement stimulus. This means that for them, those three counts will be about creating space for the original mover. Once the movement has been repeated enough times, so that everyone in the group knows how to respond, then another person is selected to start the next stimulus. Phew, hope that makes sense!

Hannah, Sita and Jason recall some of the other improvisation tasks Hofesh set during the creative period.

HANNAH Hofesh does set us plenty of improvisation tasks, especially when initially researching and creating the work. Once we even had an entire rehearsal day devoted to improvisation. It was crazy! I can remember when he asked us to work in pairs and create a short duet based on the word private.

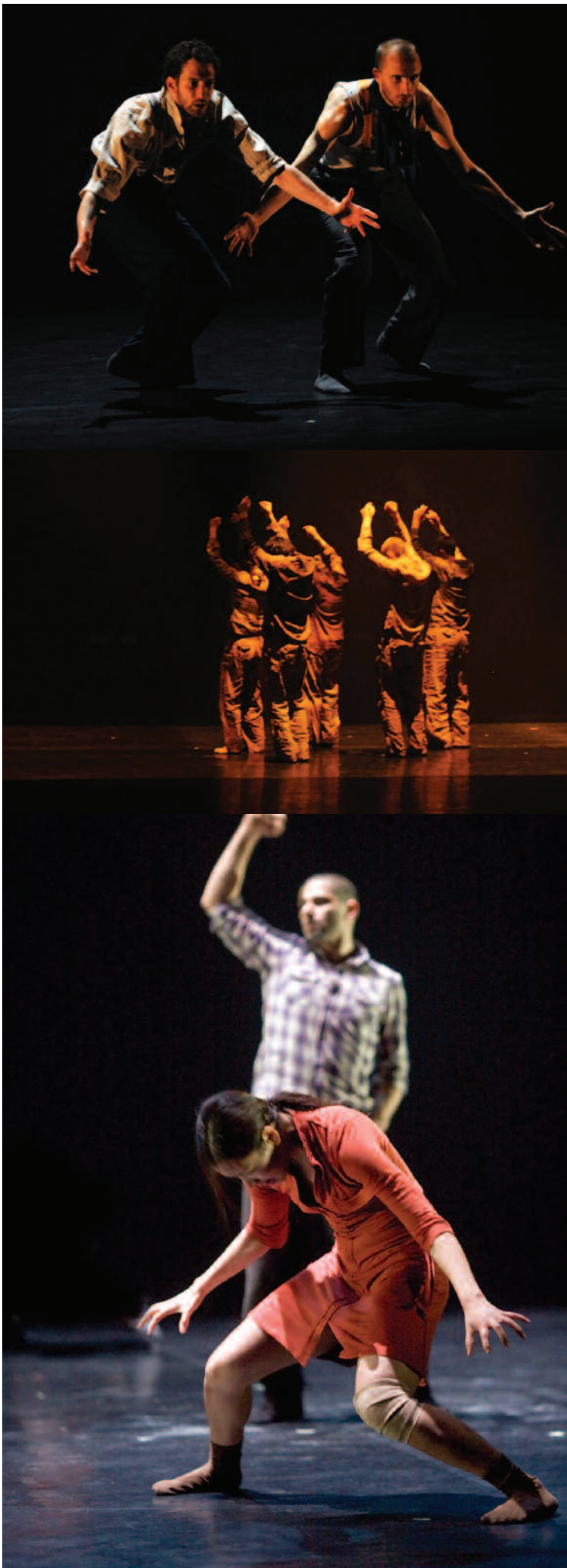
SITA Yes I remember that one. We had to work in twos and the task was to create something private and intimate, something we would do when completely alone, unwatched... Well that’s all fine, if it’s just something to think about, but you actually had to work with someone else and needed to show what you created at the end of the day. Actually out of this confusion something really special happens. Sometimes you really don’t know what he means, or you are convinced you totally got him, anyhow something is created...tasks like that are interesting, challenging and funny.

JASON Sometimes Hofesh will ask us to improvise on one idea. For example he asked me and Sita to make a half-minute duet and the instruction was ‘You can’t always get what you want. Keep trying and nothing fits.’ It was fun to create. Not sure if we’ll see it again...

HANNAH A group improvisation-based task he set us was to move around the space together with the idea of being weak, powerless and a loser. Then to move in a group switching from four different emotions and characters - samurai warrior, crazy-dog, loser, and performer.

LUCY Sita, how do you work in these improvisation tasks? Any advice?

SITA Anyone can try it. It’s fun and in a way it’s a game with yourself and your mind, rather than your body. Just listen to the images and try to let them sink into your brain and then transfer them into your body. Always from an easy, light and instinctive place, rather than from an analysing, heavy, too ‘heady’ kind of place. Like I said, it’s fun to try to get to this state of mind...



SOLO TASKS

Look at these 3 images

Each shows a very different moment in time. Of the first image Hofesh says this, 'You need to have total conviction in this moment. You are right here.'

Give each image a descriptive word, something that captures its essence for you. Can you find each image with your own body? Be as precise as you can. Try to find the essence of them as well as the shape they make in space.

Choose 3 different spots on the floor, each a distance from the other. For example your 1st spot could be central, the 2nd spot could be up against a far wall, the 3rd spot could be far downstage in the room at a low level. Each of these spots will be in an imaginary pool of light. Now number your shapes 1, 2 and 3.

Imagine the space in blackout – pitch darkness. Somebody can volunteer to call 'black out'. When you hear 'black out' go to your 1st spot and create your 1st image – remember your word, capture its essence not just the shape. Hold it here for about 7 seconds – keep it alive, breathe. When you hear 'black out' move in the imaginary darkness to your 2nd spot and create your 2nd image. Hold it still and alive. Repeat for the 3rd spot & image. Repeat this whole cycle again, each time working for clarity in the body and a sense of real intention in your work.

Now imagine the blackout to be very low-level light and find some ways to move from 1 spot and image to the next. How does this darkness influence the way you move? Explore a sense of fugitive movement and secrecy. Try a different emotion and style with each of your journeys. For some inspiration look at the group circle in **Clip 3** (1 minute 15 seconds) and see the range of travelling steps they have – low skipping, running with weight forwards, rolling, jumping.

Join these 3 still images together with the travelling that connects them. Make clear the difference in your intention between the moving parts and the still parts of your solo.

Practice this solo phrase a few times. Each time you dance it try to capture the same sense of clarity and emotion behind the movement. It's not just about hitting the shapes; think less about form and more about feeling. Search for something to help you in this intention – visual imagery, an emotion, whatever works for you...

SOLO TASKS CONT.

Let's try another stimulus for creating solo material.
Watch **Clip 4** (35 seconds) and **Clip 5** (30 seconds)

Could you describe each solo in just 2 words eg. fluid & crazy, or shaking & celebration. Here is what Hofesh says about them...of Phil's solo "that's what happens when you put too much in a space that can't carry it...". And of Maeva's solo in the red dress, "swimming upstream..."

Are these 2 solos different or similar? Use them and your words as a starting point to find some movement for yourself. Begin with an isolation – perhaps a slow shake of the head side to side. Gradually let this shake increase in its volume, spreading through your arms and chest, into your legs. Keep your two words in mind as you try to explore how to shake and shudder constantly and convey a sense of celebration and ecstasy.

Work to a set time, so allow yourself 30 seconds max and see if you can fill this time entirely and fully with your solo. Now try rushing into the space, dancing your solo and rushing off in a different direction. Or perhaps you leave the space because your movement carries you off.

Ideas for development of these solos:

- With either solo, try working on them in small groups of 4 or 5 with some feedback from your peers. Experiment with choice of music or sound to accompany the work.
- With the blackout solos, join with a partner and try dancing these solos simultaneously, using the same 3 spots in space. As you make your still images, 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.
- With the blackout solos, join with a partner and teach each other your 3 images, and your travelling material. Now link up the 2 solos to create something longer.
- In *Political Mother*, 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 at the beginning and end of your solo material. Could you use one of the travelling styles you explored previously?
- With the isolation solos, again try working on them in small groups of 4 or 5 with some feedback from your peers. Experiment with choice of music or sound to accompany the work.
- With the isolation solos, join with a partner and try dancing them simultaneously, in close proximity and then far away from each other. How does this change the viewer's perception of them?

DUET TASKS

There are 2 duets to look at here, each with a very different flavour. Watch these **Clip 6** (2 minutes 35 seconds) and **Clip 7** (2 minutes 32 seconds). and discuss the differences between the duets. Use words to describe them. What do they make you think of? Could you try and describe what each character is doing? Maybe how they might be feeling, what their intention is? Let's try to create your own duets using these as our starting points and inspiration.

DUET 1 – HANNAH AND JASON

Watch **Clip 6** and agree on 4 elements. For example:

- Partners embrace in stillness
- 1 standing, 1 kneeling, using the same gestural movement
- A simple lift
- 1 person wrapping arms around the other's hips, then both moving across the space like this

Apply some questions to each element of the duet. Why do they embrace? How do they embrace? What are they feeling? Why does Jason lift Hannah – does this signify anything to you? Always ask yourself what the intention might be. It will help you to be clear with your own intentions when you make your duet. When Hofesh works with his dancers he gives them an enormous amount of visual and emotional imagery. For him it is never just about the shapes.

Devising the gestural content - together find some movement material using some of your descriptive words eg. pleading, praying, sorrow, longing, insecurity. Just play around with this idea and see what kinds of movement gestures you come up with. Once you have found 3 or 4 things between you that you both like, learn them and repeat a few times to get them set in your minds and bodies. All the time remember your intention and your visual words to help you capture the emotion behind your movement. One person kneels beside the other and you both dance this material. Are you facing front or diagonally? Have a think about these details from the start. Keep your gaze down and internal. Look at the clip again to refresh your memories of how Hannah and Jason do this.

Now join up these 4 elements – start with an embrace of any kind in stillness, hold for at least 7 or 8 long seconds. It's harder than you think! Follow this with the gestural sequence you've just worked on. Add your simple lift; again refresh your memories by looking at the clip. Then finish with the clamped hips movement across the space. Repeat the sequence a few times, each time re-finding the intention, keep those words you discussed alive in your mind as you dance it.

Share your work with others in your group. See how each duet is different, despite identical starting points. As Hofesh said of this duet "...the music made this duet up..." so spend some time thinking about how the music might be a very important element of the overall result. Try different tracks, see what feels right.

Discuss how watching the duet with different types of music changes the work for the audience. Talk about each duet not just in terms of movement, but also in terms of emotion. Have a group evaluation about this task – did you learn anything about yourself? About working with a partner? About each other?



DUET 2: BRUNO & WINIFRED

Hofesh says, “The transition of power and weakness from one another in that duet is touching for me, and very close to the heart of the piece...”

Watch Clip 7.



How would you describe this duet? Does it look like a struggle? Something supportive? Discuss how it feels to observe it, and find words to describe it. There are moments when Winifred is shaking or dancing and Bruno stops her by ‘clamping’ her arms to her sides. With a partner try to find 3 or 4 of these moments for yourself – 1 dancer shaking or dancing, the other ‘clamping’ them shut or still.

There are other moments when Bruno is holding a position with some effort, and Winifred tries to climb into that position and hang on to him. He escapes her, shaking her off, and starts again. With your partner explore this element of the duet – 1 dancer holding a stable position, shaking with effort, the other dancer trying to climb into it, the 1st dancer escaping and shrugging off the 2nd dancer. Play around with this aspect of the duet and find 2 or 3 such moments that work for your both. As you devise the movement keep communicating with each other. What feels right and what doesn’t.

You now have 2 different elements of movement – the ‘clamping into stillness’ and the ‘climbing into contact’. Work with each other to piece them together bit by bit into a duet. Put two moments together, rehearse them, add the next bit, run it through like that. Working sequentially is the best way to learn and retain movement, rather than trying to manage the whole thing in one go. Your body and brain need to work through each part many times, repeating and refining as you go.

When you have pieced together all the elements of your duet, run it through a few times. Aim to show a difference in intention between the clamping into stillness and the climbing into contact.

Share your work with others in your group. See how each duet is different, despite identical starting points. Experiment with different types of music, and discuss how this changes the work for the audience. Talk about each duet not just in terms of movement, but also in terms of emotion. Have a group evaluation about this task – did you learn anything about yourself? About working with a partner? About each other?



GROUP WORK TASKS

Watch Clip 8 (4 minutes 50 seconds). It shows all 10 dancers on stage at once. Discuss the different ways they move – the slow motion waving and changing weight from foot to foot; the abrupt change of tempo as they run, stagger and leap around a circle of light; the floor section where they writhe, rising and collapsing into the floor. Hofesh describes this section in one word, “...panic.”

Working in groups of 6 or 7, brainstorm for some thoughts and movement ideas using this clip as your stimulus. Aim for 3 different movements that can be repeated and that mirror the way the dancers move in these 3 different ways. Remember, you are looking for the feeling that these movements will ignite when somebody watches them. So think less about shape and form and more about the emotion of the movement you are creating.

Allow time for the ideas to flow and for everybody to contribute. Explore the movement you devise, don't be content with the first thing you find, try it again and again as Hofesh does with his dancers, until you find what he calls “the juice in it...”. Keep discussions going – does the hand stay here? Is the foot kicking out in this direction? Encourage each other to work as a small company, refining and discussing movements as professional dancers do. Create a working atmosphere in your company that is questioning, engaging, hard working, and fun.

This may be material that you revisit in a subsequent lesson, to rediscover it, and perhaps find the essence of it. It is often useful to come back to material in this way. When you have all agreed on your 3 different movements, join them together in a loop:

- The movement inspired by slow motion waving and changing weight from foot to foot – repeat 8 times
- The movement inspired by the staggering and leaping in a circle of light – repeat 8 times
- The movement inspired by the floor section where they writhe, rising and collapsing into the floor – repeat 8 times

Start to assemble a longer phrase of 3 different emotions. Explore how you might use music to accompany this. Try something very harsh and loud, and try something softer and more classical. Does this change the movement in any way? Or the perception of those watching it?

MUSIC TASK

Hofesh uses Bach a lot in his work. In *The Art of Not Looking Back* he used *Concerto for 2 Violins & Strings in D Minor*. In *Political Mother* he uses *Sonata in G BWV 1021 for Violin and Continuo: 1. Adagio*. Find these 2 pieces and chose one you'd like to work with.

Listen to examples of Hofesh's own composition here: www.soundcloud.com/hofeshshechter/sets/political-mother-the (alternatively, you can buy a CD of his music via the company website). Find an excerpt that strikes you, or source some modern instrumental music that is a contrast to the Bach.

Use these 2 contrasting pieces of music, one composed in the eighteenth century, the other composed much more recently, as a stimulus for some movement. In the same way that Hofesh described one duet as starting from the music, see what happens in your body when you play one of your chosen tracks. Start still and soft with the floor (as Hofesh described earlier), close your eyes if you wish to, and respond to the piece of music that fills the room. Play it loudly so that it engulfs you. Work to find the emotional stimulus of the movement, don't worry about the shapes you are making. Discuss how this works and what it generated. Try the same thing with the contrasting piece of music.

Note whether you seemed to respond to the music with movements of a similar tempo and emotional pull, or whether you worked in opposition to the music. Discuss your process.

Use your experience of this task as a starting point for a discussion about how to make work. What comes first, the music or the movement?

Do you have a piece of music that you really love? Try using it in this task and discuss the outcome.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

MOVEMENT STYLE

How would you describe Hofesh Shechter's movement style? Is it similar to any other choreographer's work you've seen?

Here is how some dance critics describe it...

"Torsos writhe, arms plead, heads bow, whole bodies convulse in the presence of an unanswerable mystery."

Charles McNulty - The Los Angeles Times, October 2009

"...that mix of ragged energy and tautness"

Sanjoy Roy - The Guardian, March 2009

"...big, gutsy and moody"

Donald Hutera - The Times, March 2009

"...something feral and alive...There are moments in the half-dark when they don't look human at all, where they assume a completely new movement vocabulary, flying backwards like startled impalas, or racing like werewolves on all fours."

Luke Jennings - The Observer, May 2009

Read what the dancers say about working in his style on page 7. The different elements of his work. Have a think about how you might write a review of *Political Mother*. Either on your own or in a small group discuss adjectives that best describe the movement style of Hofesh Shechter.

MUSIC

"...his haunting, beat-pumped music..."

Janet Smith - Straight.com reviews, November 2009

"Shechter's densely loaded rhythms..."

Donald Hutera - The Times, March 2009

Hofesh composes much of his own music, collaborating with a group of musicians and a sound designer. Can you think of any other choreographers you have studied who also create the music for their work?

Research the work of other choreographers who use loud rock music in their work. Try Michael Clark and Mark Bruce. Now look at the work of choreographers who often use classical music in their work. Try Richard Alston and Mark Morris. Find out more about choreographers who commission contemporary music for their work - try Shobana Jeyasingh.

Discuss the role of different music genres in relation to contemporary dance.

Was the music for *Political Mother* reminiscent of anything you know? Would you compare it to any bands you know or like?

Verdi, Bach, Joni Mitchell, Hofesh's own composition of rocky guitars and drumming. Discuss the role of different music genres in relation to contemporary dance.

Discuss the impact the music has as an element in *Political Mother*. Do you think it was equal to the movement, or secondary? Perhaps you think it was the primary element in the piece?

AUDIENCE

What was the audience reaction to *Political Mother* when you saw the piece?

What was your own reaction? How did you feel when the piece was over? Did it leave you with any lasting emotions? And how did you feel about it a few days afterwards?

Were there any images or scenes from the piece that stayed with you? Which ones were they - can you describe them in as much detail as possible, including the sound and lighting as well as the performers on stage? Why do you think these particular images or scenes had an impact on you?

Here is what the critics thought:

"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."

Judith Mackrell - The Guardian, May 2010

"Dances of adulation and abandon, men and women shuddering with idealistic excitement and loss of self. Primed for obedience, duty and sacrifice... it's a fine, excoriating work, fuelled by real anger."

Luke Jennings - The Observer, May 2010

"But even in the dark void at its centre there is humanity and tenderness, never quite extinguished."

Debra Craine - The Times, May 2010

Would you agree with these reviews?
Would you disagree?
Can you explain why?

What do you think about the role of a dance critic? Would a bad review stop you from seeing a piece of theatre? Would a good review encourage you to get a ticket immediately?

Some of the performers read the reviews and others don't. Hofesh says he likes to read all his reviews as they reveal as much about the critic as they do about his work. Imagine yourself as a choreographer/composer/performer. How do you think you would feel about people writing reviews of your work and those words being widely published in newspapers and online, available for anyone in the world to read?

"It says much about Shechter's clout and reach that the standing area was packed with teenagers snapping the stage with their phones."

Mark Monahan - The Telegraph, March 2009

Hofesh has a reputation for engaging with young audiences in particular. What do you think makes his work so accessible and exciting for a teenage and young adult audience?

CHARACTERS

Discuss the role of the Samurai warrior at the beginning of *Political Mother*. It's quite a shocking first scene. What was your reaction to this – what were your expectations for the piece after this violent opening?

Discuss the Politician character in *Political Mother*. What is he yelling? What is his message do you think?

Did the other performers on stage have characters? What did you think they were? How did they move or look differently?

INFLUENCES

Alongside Bach, Hofesh has a passion for film and cites the works of Stanley Kubrick as a major influence on him. "I saw his films, each one of them left a mark...like a positive scar in me. I love to try and take from these amazing skills..."

Who or what inspires you?

THEMES

Of his other pieces:

"Pitched somewhere between philosophy and politics..."

Donald Huterer - The Times, March 2009

"...the work becomes a intensely wrought metaphor of deferred despair - an artist struggling to create, a man trying to fill the deepest gap in his life."

Judith Mackrell - The Guardian, May 2009

Other dance writers have described the themes in his previous works as urban unrest; protection and menace; friendship; ritual; religion; war; protest. What themes emerged for you as you watched *Political Mother*?

When Hofesh accepted his Critics' Circle National Dance Award for best modern choreography in 2008 he described his win as "...a paradox, since much of my work is based on being a loser." Did you feel there was a theme of losers in *Political Mother*?

'Where there is pressure there is folkdance'. Discuss this statement. How is it relevant to *Political Mother*?

In the final scene of the piece, the house lights come up, exposing the audience to each other as the song plays. What was your response to this?

RESEARCH TASKS

How much do you know about the Samurai warrior tradition? What do you suppose the significance of this was within the piece?

The Joni Mitchell song *Both Sides Now* plays at the end of the piece. Research this song.

Why do you think Hofesh chose it for his work, and for this point in the piece?

'Where there is pressure there is folkdance'. What do you know about folkdance and its emergence and history in Middle Eastern cultures? Do some research on this topic. Is there a British folkdance scene?

THE COMPANY

WHO'S WHO

The dancers and musicians in *Political Mother* number some 19. Add to that the team who work behind the scenes to help create and tour the work, and the full touring company is quite a considerable number. Not to mention all the artistic collaborators – costume designer, lighting designer and so on. Let's have a look at who's who, and then meet some of them properly.

Artistic Director: Hofesh Shechter

Dancers:

Bruno Karim Guilloire (Rehearsal Director)
Maëva Berthelot
Winifred Burnet-Smith
Chien-Ming Chang
Katherine Cowie
Christopher Evans
Philip Hulford
Jason Jacobs
Sita Ostheimer
Hannah Shepherd

The Band:

Joe Ashwin
Yaron Engler
Joel Harries
Ed Hoare
Norman Jankowski
James Keane
Vincenzo Lamagna
Andrew Maddick

Actor role:

Ben Duke/Leon Baugh

Apprentice Dancers:

Laura de Vos
Yeji Kim

Behind the scenes

Technical Production Manager: Ed Trotter

Sound Engineer: Tony Birch

Lighting Technician: Pete McCabe
& Mike Midali

Company Stage Manager: Nat Nicholson

Off stage

Executive Director: Helen Shute

General Manager: Colette Hansford

Company Administrator &

Projects Manager: Emily Gorrod

Development & Events Co-ordinator:

Arianne Fournier

Collaborators:

Lee Curran
Nell Catchpole
Merle Hensel
Tony Birch
Yaron Engler

Board of Directors:

Robin Woodhead (Chair)
Andrew Hillier QC
Dick Matchett MBE
Karen Napier

Hofesh Shechter Company

Founders' Circle:

Anonymous, Janice & David Blackburn,
Frédéric Cornu, Andrew Hillier,
Richard Matchett, Karen Napier,
Robin Pauley, Lekah Poddar,
Michael Samuel, Hofesh Shechter,
Robin Woodhead

For all company biographies go to
www.hofesh.co.uk/the-company/people-involved



Much has been written about Hofesh - many quotes about his work, his ambition, his skill at taking the audience to unexpected places. In interviews given for this resource pack during the creation of *Political Mother*, he tells us about what drives him to create, what makes him tick and what makes him laugh. For a full biography go to www.hofesh.co.uk/the-company/people-involved/artistic-director



LUCY You have achieved huge success over the last 8 years, receiving huge critical acclaim and a loyal fan base, notably amongst teenagers and young people, as well as seasoned dance fans. Where do you go from here? Do you have a game plan for the future?

HOFESH No. I don't have one. I do things as they come. I've been very fortunate with my opportunities and I've tried to make the very most out of them. I'm very lucky because these opportunities have presented themselves to me...so I don't sit and think up a plan. I'm very fulfilled in fact. I'd say I'm an opportunist. The future...who knows? I love films, maybe to direct, maybe to compose music for film...we'll see.

L How do you relax and switch yourself off from work and creating?

H When I'm making a piece I'm totally immersed in it, so I don't really relax at all. I'm a real nerd! I just sit and think about what I'm making. Thoughts and ideas come to me. To relax...I guess I sleep (though not enough during the creative period!). I don't read much, it takes longer somehow, you need to invest time and I want to invest all my time in the piece.

L Do you listen to music? What's on your iPod this week?

H You'll be surprised...I don't really listen to music much, particularly not when I'm making work. It's too busy somehow, and there is already so much in my head that other people's music can be distracting. On my iPod now though I have Bach - I love his music. He is one of my main collaborators(!). And I also have the music I composed for *Uprising* and *In your rooms*, which I use for rehearsals now.

L A work/life balance then? Do you have one??

H When I'm in a making period...er, no. Everything in life that I can suspend and delay will be suspended and delayed. I'm just in the piece. No balance! The most important thing for me is to do the very best I can do, and so I need to put all my energy into that.

"SHECHTER IS A TRUE ORIGINAL"

JUDITH MACKRELL, DANCE CRITIC FOR THE GUARDIAN, WRITING ABOUT HOFESH

L That sounds intense...so when was the last time you truly relaxed?

H In Thailand in May 2009. It was just after the girls' piece (*The Art of Not Looking Back*) had premiered, and I was very far away from my next creation so I had very little to worry about. I just let everything fall away and I didn't care for a whole week. But the nearer I get to my next piece, the big cloud of ideas moves in...and then relaxing, no it doesn't happen.

L How do you relax when you are not working? Do you have a hobby? Something totally unrelated to the world of theatre?

H Tennis...does that surprise you? I'm highly curious. I got a passion for it and so I started playing and I found I couldn't stop. I love the connection with my body again. Being outside. Yeah, I got hooked!

L You became very well known in television when you created 'Maxxie's Dance' for the opening of the second series of Channel 4's teen drama *Skins*. Do you get lots of offers from the commercial sector?

H I get quite a few and I normally say no - either there is no time in the schedule or I just don't want to go there. Offers to collaborate in theatre work, I'm far more interested in, but again there is often not much time in the schedule.

L And how do you feel about the overload of dance talent shows and reality contests that we've seen in the last few years?

H Honestly? Well it's not connected to anything I do. It doesn't mean anything for the world of 'art' as far as I'm aware. It doesn't create a real interest...it's entertainment. That's different. It's surely about the ratings, isn't it? So in the context of my work, the worlds I'm trying to create, there is no connection for me, and so no interest...

L Where do you think contemporary dance is heading in the future?

H Where everything else is heading...a spectacular crash with the sun.

L What makes you laugh?

H You know...lots of stuff. There are funny moments all the time. And some people can observe these things so precisely, and shine a light on them for the rest of us. There is a Woody Allen quote that always makes me laugh. He says, "Eternity is really long, especially near the end."

BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Helen Shute, Executive Director of the company, gives us an insight into how the company has expanded to its current size, and how it operates.

LUCY Well Helen, since the last time we chatted (in 2008 when compiling the Teachers' Pack for your *Uprising/In your rooms* tour) the company has snowballed into working for 48 weeks of the year, 22 of which will be touring weeks in 2010. Has it been a rollercoaster or a slow burn?

HELEN No, not a slow burn at all! It's been extremely fast in terms of our development, but I would say that all the growth in the company – our structures, offices, the very desks that we now own...it's all been responsive. We've responded to the demand for Hofesh's work. It's been a bit epic really! Previously it was just me and Colette, doubling up as Tour Manager, Finance Officer, Producer, Technical Manager...and we simply couldn't deliver on the volume of work that there was. And importantly, it left us no time to do any forward planning in terms of the company's development.

I Sounds overwhelming...

HELEN It was. I was getting a little scared as we were just managing an ongoing tour and never having time to think strategically. No time to plan ahead. Something had to change.

I So how did you change it?

HELEN Well there was really no let up in the touring schedule – due to the huge demand for Hofesh's work, which is great of course! But it was obvious we needed a bigger team. We also decided we needed to register as a charity, a non-profit making organisation, in other words. This took weeks and weeks of my time. So in January 2008, Hofesh Shechter Company was officially incorporated and in April 2008 we became an Arts Council Regularly Funded Organisation. We were able to appoint more people to the team – we asked Emily Gorrod, who had been doing some part time administration for us, to become our full time Company Administrator and oversee our education work and some project management too. We appointed a Technical Production Manager - Ed Trotter who joined us in September 2009. Before that we worked with a couple of different people but it wasn't until we found Ed that we had our perfect match. Finally it felt like we had a team in place who could manage the company effectively following its huge and speedy growth.

I Your role has therefore changed too then?

HELEN Yes, I moved from being the Producer to becoming the Executive Director. I now have time for proper strategy and relationship building with all our partners, co-producers and venues. I'm having to learn how to manage a lot of people – this is not something I've had to do before. But we are all in this together, and we make it work because we have all invested ourselves, our time, and ultimately our belief in Hofesh's work. Oh, does that sound a bit too hippy? It's true though, the whole company both off stage and on are pretty passionate about his artistic output.

I And during this time of massive expansion, the company was invited to become Company in Residence at Brighton Dome. What does this mean for both organisations?

HELEN Well it's a 2 way relationship certainly, both organisations benefit from it. Brighton Dome give us generous commissioning funds and get world premieres of Hofesh's work – a small piece in 2009 (*The Art of Not Looking Back*), and a full length piece in 2010 (*Political Mother*). They also housed our large-scale education project (*Bangers and Mash* 2009. See page 36).

The company also receives rehearsal space and office space at The Dome. That's the nuts and bolts of our agreement. However it goes much deeper than this. Hofesh Shechter Company and Brighton Dome are building an ongoing, long-term relationship. We want to learn about each other's organisations from the inside, how we both operate, how we can help each other through support, giving our names to each other's longer term vision, share contacts, find other ways of linking our work. We are both exploring this as we go, and it's really exciting.

I And Hofesh is also Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells. What does this entail?

HELEN He benefits from practical things such as reduced rate on studio space, the support of the Sadler's team for advice. For example their Director of Communications has been a great support on all our marketing issues and their Technical Director has also given lots of advice and support. It also means that Sadler's Wells support Hofesh through commissioning his work and facilitating projects and collaborations.

I Could you sum up all this development?

HELEN Ok...well in terms of the trajectory of an artist, Hofesh's rise has been extraordinary. And we've responded to the demand for his work, but essentially in the beginning we were three friends (Hofesh, me, Colette) who quit our jobs to launch Hofesh Shechter Company in 2008. We had no clue as to how it might work, but we had to give it a go!

I So let's talk a bit about your job...I guess it's pretty non-stop? How do you deal with the stress?

HELEN At times it is a big job with a vast amount of responsibility, yes. I'm lucky though, I'm extremely good at sleeping when and wherever I can, so I can get well rested for the really hectic times.

I How many hours a day do you really work?

HELEN Honestly, I never really stop working, but I love it. I wouldn't be driven to do it otherwise. It's quite normal for me to jump onto the email at midnight if something needs answering or fixing. If a task requires me to work for 20 hours, then I will do it. I wouldn't stop if a task was unfinished and needed to be sorted by morning. Having said that though, I know how to relax too. Having relationships unrelated to work is really important to me. I'll see my girlfriends for a meal and we'll eat and talk about other stuff. They are interested in how I am, not about the minute detail of my job...

I How has your job changed with the growth of the company?

HELEN Well...for a long time I was the trouble-shooter, trying to head off problems before they arose, or dealing with them on the spot. With a bigger team now, and clearer roles and responsibilities, I have less of that to do. And I'm also better at being a bit more hands off. I'm learning to be a manager now, how to steer a team of colleagues. We are lucky to have a very supportive board of directors, who are guiding me through that learning curve.

COMPANY VISION

Helen gives us an insight into the company's vision, ethos and a few secrets...



LUCY OK, so the company vision. What is it?

HELEN Honestly? Well, our very first vision statement was this: 'Hofesh Shechter Company aims to make the world a better place.'

That might sound a bit full on, but think about it – if you apply this to every aspect of your work...a stressful phone call with a venue perhaps, or the way you deal with a tricky contracting situation, you can very quickly work out how you need to respond. 'Is the way I'm handling this problem making the world a better place? No. So how can I change that? It sounds simplistic but I urge you to try it!

I I love it! What a great concept. I guess you all benefit?

■ Totally. For example, as soon as we could manage it financially, we invited the dancers to take up full time contracts. This was an early wish from Hofesh – to properly reward the commitment his dancers had shown by being in his early pieces in between other jobs. And by offering full time contracts, including National Insurance payments, holiday entitlement, sick leave and so on, we were certainly making the dancers' worlds a better place. And it left us feeling happy that we'd managed to do this. A virtual circle...

I And the company mission? What do you aim to do?

■ We aim to produce Hofesh's work, nurture his creative output, and allow and encourage as many people as wish to, to participate and be involved in some way. And our remit is as follows – the South East where we are based, the UK, the world...

I Tell us something we don't know about Hofesh.

■ Well, I'm always inspired by how incredibly highly he regards his dancers. He's extremely clear about this. I've never known a choreographer who talks so highly of his dancers – he's in love with them all, artistically speaking. He views them as such an important part of his process – not just bodies who can learn his rep. In the past he would rather rework a piece to accommodate a dancer's absence (through illness or injury perhaps) than to teach that part to somebody brand new. It's about what that dancer has invested in the rehearsal process, not being able to be replicated at the last minute by a stranger. The dancers he works with are vital collaborators for him, even though the movement itself is mostly created by him – he sees them, by which I mean the people not just their bodies, as utterly irreplaceable. This may surprise some people who think they know Hofesh and the way he operates...

I So, how do the dancers respond to this attitude?

■ I can't speak for them each in person, but I do know that collectively they feel like they have contributed to the successes of the company so far, that in part it is down to their commitment and energy that we have reached this far this fast. I hope they feel like they have achieved something unusual, and that they have our thanks and support forever! This mutual respect gives me strength at times of pressure and anxiety.

- I** With so many collaborators on board for this piece, how do you keep everyone happy? Do you try and act as a 'buffer' between them and Hofesh when he's in the studio?
- ||** No, Hofesh has always had personal relationships with his collaborators and prefers this really. It's easier and faster for him to chat directly with them than to be relaying messages via me. That's more work for all of us!

I What about raising funds? Who does that?

- ||** I do. We are fortunate to be an Arts Council RFO (regularly funded organisation), so that gives us secured funds to a certain limit. Anything else we need, I must raise through funding bids or co-commissioning agreements. For *Political Mother* I sought financial support from some of our key venues who are particular fans and supporters of Hofesh's work, and invited them to be co-commissioners of his next piece. (See page 35 for a full list of these organisations).

I How much time do you spend/can you manage to spend in the studio during the creation of a piece? Is it important that once you've raised the money and overseen the many practicalities, that you see it in creation, or are you then hands off?

- ||** I think that in order to do my job really well, I need to properly know the company and the work. So I try to stay really connected with them and the piece throughout its creation and touring.

I When we spoke before, you said the hardest part of your job was second guessing Hofesh, and trying to work out what he might need. Is this still true?

- ||** Yep! Totally. He is extremely surprising and impossible to predict. It's never dull!

I Let's chat a bit about touring now. Do you still always travel with the company?

- ||** As much as I possibly can, yes. For me, having a personal relationship with each and every venue we tour to is a fundamentally important part of my work with the company. I've seen the work on practically every stage we have toured to, so I can know well in advance, what any possible limitations might be for this new piece. I can then chat with the venue well in advance and problem solve with them, so that we all get an even better experience this time around. I believe that investing in ongoing relationships with our key venues' directors and staff is utterly worth it. During a show, Hofesh and I will sit in the auditorium and I'll be madly scribbling stuff down – perhaps he notices that a lighting cue is no longer quite right, or I might have a question about a costume change. Anything really. We can then get these things sorted quickly before the next gig. And we're on hand to meet and chat with venue staff beforehand, and celebrate a successful show afterwards. It also works in reverse too though – if we have an unforeseen disaster, for example some technical nightmare that means we have to open the house a bit late, I am on hand to offer explanations and help calm nerves with the venue staff, and of course apologise in person, rather than via email the next day. I have to say (blowing our trumpet a bit here) that every single venue promoter I know says how much they love having the work in their space. I hope this is due in part to them getting the full deal, and a real presence both on stage and off, when the company perform there.

“...PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT NEW DANCE WORK TO BE CREATED IN BRITAIN SINCE THE MILLENNIUM.” LUKE JENNINGS, DANCE CRITIC FOR THE OBSERVER, WRITING ABOUT IN YOUR ROOMS

I And the current *Political Mother* tour? How is that shaping up?

- ||** We currently have 28 venues booked, 8 UK and 20 international.

Go to www.hofesh.co.uk/tour-dates/current for full tour calendar

I What has been your best tour moment?

- ||** I think our recent show in Paris was special tour moment for me because there had been a fair bit of negative hype beforehand about how tough Parisian audiences are, and we were unsure how the show would be received. And then it went down a storm. It felt like such an achievement to prove the doubters wrong!

But my all time favourite tour moment was at an open air gig in Austria, (the stage was literally up a mountain), on our *Uprising/In your rooms* tour. It was a bit disappointing as there wasn't a huge audience and everyone was a bit tired. Then during what I think of as the crazy section in *In your rooms* when the lighting cues are fast and frantic and the dancers and musicians are performing flat out, there was an enormous thunderstorm. The lightning was cracking down, and there were huge rolls of thunder. It was the most utterly perfect backdrop for that section of the piece; you couldn't have designed it better! It really was extraordinary. A gift. Perfectly timed - we really needed a boost!

I What has been your worst tour moment

- ||** Oh...groan. There have been a few...my worst was probably when we flew from Melbourne to Los Angeles, and we'd not been able to fly directly so we'd all been travelling for 24 hours. The dancers were exhausted. We were all exhausted. Due to the tight schedule and time differences we'd only managed to squeeze in a single day off for them. And here we were, in that single day off...having arrived at the hotel to be told we were unable to have an early check in. They all needed to sleep SO badly and we were all just standing there in the hotel foyer, jet lagged, dazed and miserable. Oh it was awful...and I felt SO responsible!

I OK so let's end on a more positive note then! In the studio you get the impression that everyone gets along, and certainly the dancers speak of Hofesh with real passion for the work and much respect for him. Does any of that love make its way over here to the office?!

- ||** Yes, we know that all the performers appreciate the hard work that happens here in this room, in order to get the show made and on the road successfully. I'm not saying they shower us with cards and flowers, but they do often individually thank us. I'd say the office team has a good relationship with them all, and we now have dancers' reps in place who can bring any collective questions and issues to us, so communication lines are always open.



Ed Trotter, who runs all the technical aspects of the company's work, tells us what this actually entails.

LUCY Hello Ed. Can you tell us what your main responsibilities as Production Manager are?

ED The first and foremost is to get the show on, safely and on time and in a way that fulfills Hofesh's artistic vision. You have the very real and constantly present pressure of an audience arriving and expecting to see something. Everything else is just following steps to get to that point:

Preparation - being a link between the "creatives" and the "practical". All "art" in theatre is really a craft and you need to make sure people's ideas can be made real.

Advancing - talking to venues about what you want to do and working out how to do it.

Scheduling - allowing enough time and people for everyone to get what they need to get done, done.

Making sure things happen in the right order, so much time can be lost by doing things the wrong way round.

Logistics - getting all the things you will need to the place that you need them.

Constant Risk Assessment - making sure that everything you are doing and everything you are asking people to do is safe for them and for everybody else.

Budgeting - keeping on top of the money, knowing how much you have to spend and working out if it is enough.

Fire Fighting - no matter how much you plan, things can and do go wrong and you need to be flexible enough to fix it and still keep everyone happy as much as possible...

I'd say those are the main responsibilities I have.

L How far in advance of the company beginning to make a new piece, do you have to start conversations with Hofesh about logistics (either for rehearsals or subsequent touring?)

E As early as possible. The best production managers are the ones that allow the artists the longest possible time before they have to make firm choices but it is never too early to start the conversation. Apart from anything else it gives you time to research things and learn. Even if the whole project takes a different turn, the knowledge and thought won't be wasted. Hofesh has a very good understanding of practical constraints coupled with an ambition to push them, so in fact he is very interested in what the implications are for all of his choices. So again early conversations are never wasted.

One thing to be very careful about though, is the difference between discussing something and making a choice. Once a choice is made it can be very hard and very expensive to go back, hence the advantage of delaying these decisions for as long as possible.

L So what are the top three most important questions that you need to ask Hofesh at this early stage of the piece being created?

E What will the show look like? What will it sound like? What is the latest that we can have these things in place, as far as he is concerned?

L How much time (if any) will you need to spend seeing the work in the studio as it is made?

E It really depends on the direction that the project takes. I do like to see what Hofesh is working on as it helps me understand what he is asking for, but it becomes much more useful closer to the production, when things become much more fixed and I can get a handle on the detail of the practical considerations.

I Does the company own its own lights & sound equipment? Is that usual for a middle-scale dance company, in your experience?

E We own a dance floor which is very common and very useful. We own a lighting desk and a MIDI system (that links our desk with the sound source) which is unusual but essential for us. The timings of the lighting cues are very precise and having the consistency of our own system that both Hofesh and Pete (who does our re-lights) know well, saves us hours on a fit up. We don't own much more that we would use in a venue. This isn't unusual for mid-scale dance companies, as we don't have a huge amount of money for transport or storage, and most venues have a fairly standard lantern stock and access to a hire company for the bits they don't have that we may request. I am looking into touring our own sound equipment but the reality is, sound equipment is big and heavy and it costs quite a lot to transport.

I Do you tour with the piece to oversee everything for every performance once it is on the road?

E I have done and certainly expect to, for the majority of the new piece, if only because at the start of a tour things are more likely to go wrong or need to be changed, and because seeing the choices that Hofesh makes as they come up, means I can make better decisions when planning for the next gigs.

I Who is your technical team? How do you hire them?

E Building a team that can work together effectively when under time pressure is vital to the safe running of the show and the tour. So I'm always interested in personal recommendations from other colleagues in the dance sector. If somebody is suggested to me and I don't know them already I would meet them for a coffee and a chat, and ask people who have worked with them in the past to give me a verbal reference. All this happens organically, before we even get to the interview stage.

The team spends so long together and under sometimes quite stressful conditions, it is very important for everybody to get on. A lot more of the job is people skills than you might think, and whilst you need to have knowledge and experience it is almost more important that you have the right attitude. With that, more often than not, the other stuff comes anyway.

I How long will get-in be for this piece?

E To start with we have a luxurious 3 or 4 days but until we all can settle into a routine, we will need it, and it means we can work in a slightly less pressured way. However all too soon we will settle into 2 day get-ins. It sounds like a long time, but believe me it soon flies!

I What kind of things can go wrong during a get in? How do you fix these various problems that arise, given that time is always tight?

E It is almost always about running out of time for a whole host of reasons, ranging from the local crew being a bit slow, a fire alarm going off, having to change things on the fly because on paper it looked ok but in reality it doesn't work. Very often because for one reason or another things have happened in the wrong order, we are constantly chasing our tail, but I have to say, things on the last tour went pretty smoothly, I can only hope that we do as well with this one!

The worst thing that has happened to me (when I was working with another company) was at a theatre in Macedonia, where 45 minutes before we were due to open the auditorium, the heavens opened and the holes in the roof of the prefab soviet built theatre became apparent. Water was pouring in all over stage through the carefully focused lights and all over the dance floor. The local crew didn't seem bothered, but sure in my knowledge that water and electricity are not a good mix I persuaded them to turn everything off, while I discussed with the company what to do. We briefly considered pulling the show, but given that over 1,000 people had booked to see it we instead decided to dry the floor off as best we could and pull the whole thing forward onto the massive fore-stage which didn't seem to have any leaks above it. The dancers went through all the entrances and exits that would have to change, I worked out a way that we could hang the masking differently to make the place still look as good as it could and my colleague (who was relighting) managed to focus what few lights that would reach that part of the stage, so she could busk some lighting that would look like a design (she did it brilliantly!). We opened the doors 20 minutes late but we had a show and the audience gave us a standing ovation. Mad but exhilarating and definitely worth it!

I What 3 characteristics do you need to have as production manager dealing with a big touring piece and a company of this size?

E Patience, clarity, and a sense of humour. I'm not sure I always have the first two!

I What is the most stressful part of a job like yours?

E I think it has to be the ticking clock. This is the countdown to the auditorium doors opening, and can feel especially stressful when you are dealing with a slow local crew or a disorganised venue. The most boring bit is definitely chasing information from venues, followed closely by working out how to get everything from one venue to the next.

I What is the most rewarding part?

E Watching the show looking and sounding brilliant after either having had a relaxed time because everything you planned worked, or after managing to pull it out of the bag when everything has gone wrong and a few hours earlier you were wondering how the hell you were going to manage!

I What do you do to wind down after a big tour away from home?

E Well, this may or may not surprise you, but I did a cooking course in Ireland a few years back. So cooking would be my wind down activity of choice...

ADMINISTRATION

Emily Gorrod, Company Administrator & Projects Manager gives us an insight into what her job is, and what an average days looks like during a busy tour period.

LUCY Hello Emily. Can you tell us a little about what the main areas of your job are?

EMILY My job falls into two parts. In my role as Company Administrator I compile schedules for Hofesh and the company when they are rehearsing. This sounds easy, but in reality is extremely detailed! I book studios for rehearsals, class teachers to lead morning warm up class and answer day-to-day enquiries that we get via email, phone or post. I manage the company databases and website. I am also responsible for the delivery of our education projects, which, range from a half-day school workshop, to intensive workshop weeks for professionals, to large-scale projects such as our 2009 project *Bangers and Mash*. I organise auditions when the Company is looking for new dancers. I am also the marketing contact, providing tour venues with all the information that they need about the work in order to produce marketing materials such as flyers, programmes and information for their websites. This involves sending images, copy and promotional materials such as press packs.

I That's sounds like a great deal of work!

E Yes it is, but all the hard work is worth it when a project comes together, for example seeing the premiere of one of Hofesh's new works and feeling an amazing sense of achievement at having played a part in making that brilliant performance happen. The company is very busy and there is always so much to be done, but when the projects come together you realise that the hard work is absolutely worth it!

I So what does the other part of your job entail?

E In my role as Projects Manager I am responsible for the delivery of all our projects - a new piece, an education project, this teachers' resource pack. So I maintain the project schedule, ensuring that deadlines are met, hold any necessary auditions for either dancers or musicians, arrange meetings for Hofesh with potential collaborators, organise regular project catch up meetings, and book accommodation and travel for the company when necessary. Essentially I do whatever I can in order to make the project as successful as possible, so every day there will be something different!

I You report to Colette, the General Manager. How is your job different to hers?

E I work closely with Colette on a number of things, particularly during touring periods where I might assist her with obtaining visas for the company, producing comprehensive tour books and booking flights. Colette deals with all of the contracts for performances and for all staff that work with us, as well as setting policies for the company. She also works with Helen to set budgets and helps advise me with how to manage the budgets that I am given.

I For anyone who might not know...what is a tour book?

E It is basically the tour essential so has everything in it that the company might need for touring. It starts with a schedule that lists where the company are each day, with all the details of the day so this might be the performance day schedule, or information about workshops or whatever is happening that day. Then we'll add travel and accommodation arrangements, information about the venues, a map to show where in the world the venues are, a list of class teachers for each day, information about currency, electricity and emergency service numbers, baggage allowance and contacts lists - one of everyone in the company who is away touring and one of all the venues and the contact at each one. It

is pretty extensive and takes a long time to compile! Our Company Stage Manager, Nat, who tours with the Company, now takes responsibility for compiling the tour book and does a fantastic job - it is really important that she knows about everything that is happening on tour so compiling the tour book helps her to learn about the very detailed tour schedule.

I So, from visiting the office I can see that you are all very busy. What are your jobs on a day-to-day basis when the company is in a creative or rehearsal period?

E Every morning I check that the studio is set up correctly, making sure there is a dance floor laid (if we are in a new space), ensuring it is warm enough, lights are on, there is a sound system available - really basic but important things! I will also visit the studio during the day to see the dancers and Hofesh. I can check that they have everything they need and often to pass on messages about the schedule. There are also quite a few press interviews that come up in the run up to a premiere so I liaise with our PR consultant to arrange these at a suitable time for Hofesh and make sure they run smoothly.

I And how does this differ to when the company is touring?

E My job can feel very different when the dancers are away because it is much less hands on and more desk-based! However, it gives me a bit more time to plan for the next project and organise any workshops, auditions and intensives that the company might be running. During a tour I also liaise with the venues the company are touring to.

I Do you travel with them at all?

E A little bit! Generally I don't travel with the company but there are times when I am needed. For example we held an audition in Lyon last year that I'd organised, so I travelled with the company for that. It is nice to tour a little bit because getting to watch the shows when you haven't seen the work for a while reminds you that all the hard work behind the scenes is absolutely paying off! It is also really good to meet some of the people who I have been in email or telephone correspondence with for quite a while in the many months before the performances. Actually putting a face to a name is great!

I How much of a relationship do you build with the dancers and musicians in the company? Is this important to you?

E I think that it is really important to build a relationship with the dancers and musicians. The nature of being part of a dance company means that everyone works together very closely, sometimes 24/7 when they are on tour, so it is really good to know everyone well and understand their different needs. Then I can organise their schedule as best as possible - whether it is organising the best and simplest accommodation and travel options, or booking class teachers that they particularly enjoy. It is also just really nice to have a good relationship with the company because it makes my work easier and hopefully theirs too! I try to take class with the company a couple of times a week too and this just gives me an opportunity not only to take class which is wonderful, but work in the space with them a little and get a feeling for how they are and if there are any questions or issues I can help with.

I What is the really hard bit of your job?

E Dealing with the very crazy (but exciting) schedules as well as all the other small but no less important jobs, all at the same time! When you are trying to arrange accommodation, travel and schedules for 10 dancers and 8 musicians, technical crew, collaborators, office staff as well as specific events or meetings or interviews that Hofesh is needed for...well it can be quite a logistical nightmare to make everything work!



Dancers rehearsing *In your rooms* in Trafo, Budapest

Touring a piece, particularly when it's in as much demand as Hofesh's work is, can be exciting - seeing more of this country, travelling the world, meeting new people, discovering different cultures, being respected as an artist abroad. It can also be exhausting - back to back travel, not much time to recover before needing to perform, jet lag, not really having the chance to discover a city before it's time to leave, missing family and home. Life on the road as part of a large touring company presents lots of highs and lows.

Let's talk to Bruno Karim Guillore, the company's Rehearsal Director and also a dancer in the piece, about the reality of touring and how he balances his dual roles as dancer and rehearsal director.

LUCY So Bruno, firstly how did you come to meet Hofesh and become involved in his work?

BRUNO It was over 4 years ago, I was taking a class, my first after arriving in London. Hofesh was taking the same class. After about 5 minutes I realised this just wasn't going to work for me. I hated it. So I stopped dancing and went to the side and stretched out. I think Hofesh was interested in this decision to exclude myself and do what my body needed, which certainly wasn't a Cunningham class right then. After class was finished he came over and struck up a conversation. I think he was intrigued to know a little more about my decision to stop. We clicked immediately and went off to find a free studio. I auditioned for him there and then - he taught me some phrases of his, we explored a bit through improvisation. And he said yes, I'd like you to work in my company and offered me a job.

L Sounds like it was meant to be. So you've been in the company since that time?

B Yes, and I've been Rehearsal Director since 2008. This was a role I'd never had before in any company.

L Helen describes "handing the piece over to Bruno" once you are touring. How does this work in reality, given that you are performing the work too? Is it a huge workload?

B It's sort of depends on the dancers, and where they are all at. Often my job is more about psychology than the actual steps we dance. I always try to gauge the dynamics of the group - tiredness, ego, how the last performance went, and so on. My work as rehearsal director is often primarily about that. Then we take things from there...

L That's really interesting. So how much cleaning and refining of the steps actually takes place then?

B Well I actually don't know everybody's steps. That would be impossible. I know my steps. So when we need to do cleaning or clarifying of the movement, it's in response to a section that maybe feels like it needs tightening up. Or perhaps a dancer has a question about some aspect of a particular movement. Again it depends on the dancers.

L What skills do you need to be a rehearsal director?

B You need to be decisive. That's it. As a dancer in other companies I hated indecisive rehearsal directors. It's such a waste of everyone's time, you could spend 3 hours discussing a movement, do the palms face down or out, is the knee bent on 6 or on 8? It's pointless. You need to be able to listen to opinions or who can remember what, then make a decision - ok it's like this now. That's it. We move on. I try not to be a tyrant, but I know what needs to be done, so let's do it.

L Chris (one of the dancers) has talked quite passionately about Hofesh's work not being 'diluted' as you teach existing repertoire to new members of the company, that it's not 'about the steps'. Do you see this as your responsibility, that the work stays undiluted?

B It's important that the ideas stay strong. For me, the steps don't matter too much. It's the way Hofesh has put the steps together that matter. It's like writing - all writers use the same words but they put them together into phrases and sentences in different ways. So for me the 'words', in this case the steps, are secondary. We need to search for what Hofesh was thinking and feeling when he made those steps. That's what I try to preserve through dancing in his work and also through my role as rehearsal director for the company.

L How much can you allow the piece to evolve a bit as it tours? I know this often happens organically, and suddenly months later you all realise that a certain movement has become something else entirely. Do you always pull it back, or do you let some stuff develop and emerge?

B Well to be honest, I think if you get too concerned with cleaning, cleaning, cleaning the material it loses something of its originality and becomes mechanic. So I'm in favour of the work having its own journey. I don't like to get too concerned with that. It's about the essence of the material - that's the part that is worth preserving.

L How do you warm up (yourself/the company) before a show?

B It's always my responsibility to warm up the company on get in day. I'll lead a class for everyone, though often I'd rather not teach...but I do find that by leading a class I'll end up doing what my body also needs to prepare for the time ahead.

I What do you always take on tour with you?

B My laptop. I need to Skype my family and stay in touch every day. Due to the high demand for Hofesh's work we can sometimes be abroad for a month at a time...that's a long time to be away, so keeping in touch and being able to see my family (and them see me) is crucial. In fact I'd say most of us in the company take our laptops on tour – for long flights you can watch a movie...and then being able to easily email and Skype is important when you're away. Other than that...knee pads. Strapping for my knee. Socks. Everything else in my bag is obvious...

I How do you relax when you have the odd bit of time off on tour?

B Do you know...we're not such a 'going out' company in between performances. Some companies I've worked with are all about hitting the town after a show. However we tend to be quite calm and quiet in between shows in this company. Maybe it's because some of us are older, maybe because there are so many couples in the company. I have no agenda in between shows, other than taking care of myself for the next one. So I try to eat well, take a good bath, maybe book a massage if I need one. It's the simple stuff that's important.

Here we talk to some members of the company about the realities of touring.

MUSICIANS

LUCY How do you warm up before a performance?

JOEL I get my hands moving...and make sure the gear isn't broken.

YARON Warming up is quite personal I think. It really depends on the space. I'm interested in group warm-ups when it feels right. For example, at some performances last year, we started to just jam together during our warm up time. The space allowed it, and it felt right.

I How do you wind down after a show?

Y Well, I guess it depends on the show...how it went, how you're feeling.

J I usually wind down in the bar.

Y I never go to the bar... I don't smoke, don't drink - some kind of a 'fake musician'!

I What do you always take on tour with you? Apart from your instruments...

J My laptop, with recording software. I like to write new stuff when I'm away from home – I don't actually write that much at all when I'm at home. So it's good to get inspired by new places.

Y Yes, my laptop too. I like to Skype, I still can't believe it's possible to do this for free.

I Are you looking forward to this tour?

J Yes, totally. I'm up for it...

Y Me too, touring is fun, crazy sometimes... It is great to be able to travel the world and see many places that I am not sure I would go to otherwise. Sometimes it is a bit tough but in general – great experience!

I Do you read the reviews of the work when you are on tour?

J Yes, I read the reviews for the Roundhouse shows I played in last year. The music is often secondary though in a review – I guess dance critics reviewing Hofesh's work are reviewing the dance mainly.

Y I do read them if they are in front of me, but I don't go searching for them. The critic may not enjoy the work, but the crowd love it...and it's not always the case that the critic would mention this crowd reaction. We're on the stage, we're sincere, we're trying to give something to the crowd – and hopefully the crowd likes it. That's enough for me.

I What do you do when you're not on tour?

J I write lots of music, I play gigs (I have an album released), I play in a three-piece band called 72% Morrissey. And no, we are nothing like Morrissey on any level.

Y I am Musical Director for the company Tapeplas, which is located in Barcelona – that's been my very big project over the last six years. Apart from that I do other freelance gigs when there is time.

DANCERS

LUCY Jason, I know you all live and work together for much of the year, for *Political Mother* both in the creation period in Brighton and Plymouth, and then once the tour begins. How intense is this?

JASON Well at the moment lots of us are sharing a house, but it's big enough to find your own space. And yesterday for example, Hofesh let us go a little earlier so I went and sat by the sea. If you need space on your own it's always possible to find it.

I I suppose that by living and working together you bond as a company very quickly?

J Yes, the integration is very fast. Travelling and working with a group of people is the best way to integrate! For the last tour we did, which was my first with the company, I had a very intense month of rehearsals, then we hit the road for three months almost continuously. There is no better way to bond with your colleagues!

I Is there anything you like to take on tour with you, to make you feel at home?

J Well, I'm kind of a nomad these days, I've not had my own apartment since I left Germany, so I don't have all my possessions with me...but wherever it's possible, I like to bring my guitar on tour with me. I've actually been looking for a travel guitar for touring. Other than that, my laptop and a good book. I have one at the moment that's very heavy, it's going to add to my baggage weight but I'm determined to finish it!

I How do you treat yourself when you're on tour?

J I get into the hot tub or a sauna whenever I can. It's the best way for me to unwind. So I always take my swimming trunks on tour with me.

I In the rare moments you have to yourself to relax and daydream when you're on a busy tour, do you ever wonder where you'll be in ten years time?

J Wow, that's a good question! Well this is my 11th year of dancing professionally...and I'd like to believe enough in my own creativeness that perhaps one day I'd make my own work. We'll see... Maybe in ten years time I'll be a goat farmer somewhere in Middle Asia. Yeah, I'd quite like that I think.

LUCY Hi Sita. Tell us a bit about working and travelling together with this group of people.

SITA Well you're all living together in hotels, on planes, in theatres. Yes it can get a little intense at times, but if you need space to yourself, you go and find it.

I Do you read the reviews of Hofesh's work when you're touring?

S Not really, I'm not thinking about that. I just concentrate on doing my work really well, the best I can do.

I How do you relax on tour? Say you arrive in a city and you don't have a call to be in the theatre until the following morning. What do you do?

S I find a café with Chris and we sit and watch, chat, read, be calm. I try to get as much daylight and sunshine as possible as we'll spend most of the next day and evening inside a dark space.

I And in between shows? Do you explore and sight see?

S I aim for calm times between the performances. I like to have a wine and a chat with my colleagues after the shows, but going out...not really until after the final performance. For me I need to focus and save my energy for the shows - the work is so physically intense. I don't want to be wandering around with a guide book for hours in my free time!

I What has been your best Hofesh Shechter Company tour moment, either on stage or off?

S Hmm...there are lots of moments, small and big. I think the best thing for me is that my boyfriend is with me on tour, doing the same job I do.

I What has been your worst backstage crisis?

S I don't really remember my backstage dramas, I've done this job long enough to get used to stress behind the stage. Anyway for me the biggest stress happens about four weeks before a premiere. Everything that could go wrong, meaning everything that holds you back - not being on stage on time and not prepared enough, that all happens at night, in my dreams...

I Is there anything you pack in your suitcase to help you feel at home?

S My incense sticks.

LUCY Hello again Hannah. Tell us about what you take on tour with you...

HANNAH All the usual, but nothing in particular! The thing about touring with this company is that everyone is very pleasant to be around, and extremely funny - it is never boring!! So I don't need to take anything else with me...

I How do you unwind after a show?

H I take a good amount of time to stretch, followed by a nice warm shower. By then I'm usually ready to eat!

I What about reviews...do you read them when you are on tour?

H Yes I do, I think it's interesting to see how people are reacting to his work, and if what they find within it is connected at all to what we feel when performing the work. And even if it's completely different, then knowing that people have seen something else and discovering what their interpretation is...I find that very revealing.

I Do you have a favourite tour treat?

H I have to say we are treated very well! When we toured to Australia after a very long flight all the company members were booked in to have a massage - it was greatly received! Another lovely treat we had was in Paris after a show, the company went to a quaint restaurant to have a delicious French meal.

LUCY Chris, let's talk about how you warm up and get into the Hofesh flow when you are all on tour.

CHRIS We have company class when we're on tour of course. For my own warm up though I tend to spend a lot of time on the quads and hips. For me that's the area that develops tension quickly. Simple hanging over straight legs until you can really "hang", that's a good one. Tennis ball in the IT band (the iliotibial band running along the thigh) and hip...not for the faint hearted but it does the trick.

I And how about cooling down after a performance?

C I'm not one for big cool downs after a show. A good hot shower, and a light stretch of the legs I find to be enough. There's a lot more going on in the body chemically after a show, so I like to let the body sort itself out, admittedly with the help of a beer.

I Do you read the reviews of Hofesh's work when you are on tour?

C I don't go out of my way to read reviews, although some days I'll walk in to the dressing room to find last night's write up on the wall. I have an undisputed belief that Hofesh's work is right for this moment in time. I know there is demand for what he's doing, as the tour never seems to end! The response to things like auditions and workshops, plus individual comments about the work give a much clearer collective review than any critic could.

I Do you have a favourite tour treat?

C Finding a cafe or a bar (depending on what time we arrive) and people watching for a while...

I What do you take on tour to make yourself feel at home?

C Arnica muscle rub is a must. And I love to read - many pairs of trousers have been thrown out of the suitcase to make room for one more book. Luckily I can take my girlfriend with me on tour without spending a penny of my own money, as she's also in the company. What more would I need to feel at home?

APPRENTICES

A word about the apprentice dancers working with the company. Emily Gorrod explains:

The apprentices work with us as part of the postgraduate diploma/MA course at London Contemporary Dance School (www.theplace.org.uk/lcds). They literally started this week (week 6 of creation period) after auditioning at The Place in February 2010. They do a set number of weeks with us over the year, alongside attending school and completing written assignments. For this year the 2 girls will be working effectively as understudies for *Political Mother* so will be touring with us to most of the venues so if anyone gets injured we can use one of them. The apprenticeship allows them to get a deep insight into the workings of a professional dance company and of course strengthen their technique and performance skills. They will also (as part of their course they have to do this) perform at least a couple of times and maybe more if we feel that they are ready or of course if we need them to cover someone who may be injured.

JOB PATHWAYS – CAREERS IN THEATRE

Here we profile a few members and collaborators of the company and ask how they came to be doing their jobs.

HELEN SHUTE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I was all set for the university route – I was thinking of reading Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Then I did a summer school at Laban and suddenly was immersed in all this amazing dance and meeting people from all over the world. I was hooked and decided to audition for a place at the school. And to my delight I got it. Within 3 weeks of my first term I knew I wasn't going to be a dancer, but that I wanted to work in dance, with dancers, helping them to realise their ambitions. Early on I had a desire to work with talented people and to connect.

I moved fast, playing to my strengths! I became president of the Students' Union whilst I was there and also offered to manage some of my very talented friends. By the time I left I had a portfolio of artists that I was producing – a bit ambitious for a 22 year old but I knew this was the direction I wanted to travel in. It was whilst I was managing some of these friends in their Resolution pieces that I met John Ashford who was then Director at The Robin Howard Dance Theatre at The Place. It was John who put me in touch with a few people who were further along in their careers and who needed a bit of support. So John offered me a desk at The Place, and unconditional support. Through him, I ended up producing a Latin American dance festival for Ana Sanchez Colburg - I had 52 artists from South America to manage, let's say I was thrown in at the deep end! It was during this time that I also furthered my studies by undertaking an MA in Theatre Design at Goldsmiths College.

Encouraged by John Ashford I then took on a 6 month contract with Woking Dance Festival, working with Eckhard Thiemann, which was an invaluable experience. During this time I applied for an 18 month Senior Dance Manager Fellowship in Dance Programming. I was successful in that application, which is how I came to work at The Place with John. His name keeps cropping up! It's true to say that the reason I'm here today is John Ashford. He's pretty exceptional at taking a risk with young people who have the ambition but not necessarily the experience. Through John I met Hofesh and produced a three way co-commissioned event. John taught me how to work with artists, how it's important to work in what you believe in. He has this great quote which goes "We are led by the artists we choose to serve...". I love this quote and refer to it often. It really forms the backbone of what my work with Hofesh Shechter Company is about.

HANNAH SHEPHERD - DANCER

My training in dance started at Sixth Form College, where I did A Level Dance, but throughout my childhood I'd been into gymnastics and trampolining. Infact I competed regionally and nationally, so I guess you could say I'd always been into moving! After my A Levels, I went to London Contemporary Dance School for three years. I then auditioned for and joined the postgraduate performing company EDge. That was a great experience, working with a range of choreographers and touring not just in this country but also internationally. I came into contact and was introduced to Hofesh through another company member. I then auditioned for the company and still am very pleased to have got the job!

EMILY GORROD COMPANY ADMINISTRATOR & PROJECTS MANAGER

I did a degree in Dance and Culture at the University of Surrey, which involved a placement year during which I worked at DanceXchange in Birmingham (at the same time as Hofesh was making work for Bare Bones, the DanceXchange resident company), and then at The Place in London (where Hofesh was Associate Artist at the time!). After I completed my degree I felt that I really needed to challenge my body a bit more so I trained for one year at London Contemporary Dance School on the one year higher certificate course which was such a brilliant year! Whilst studying at The Place I was also working in the Artist Development and Theatre departments part time as JUICE editor - a dance listings magazine for professionals. After completing the One Year Certificate course, I did a couple of small dance projects including one with a special needs school in East London which was an incredible experience. However, I continued to work at The Place and was involved with the Spring Loaded season and The Place Prize 2008. I started working with Hofesh on a freelance basis on just a couple of days a week but it soon became clear that there was so much work I needed to be there more and so in November 2008 I joined the company full time.

Many of my contemporaries went into teaching GCSE and A Level dance and quite a few also decided to do an MA. A couple of others took a similar route to me and now work in dance management and administration either at National Dance Agencies or for dance companies or dance schools. I think most of us (we were actually a small year of about 30) are working in dance in some way. For me my placement year was invaluable and set me up for where I am now - it was in that year that I first came across Hofesh and met so many of the people that I work with now.

JOEL HARRIES - MUSICIAN IN THE BAND

My dad is a musician and my mum is a music teacher, so I guess you could say I grew up around music. There were always instruments lying around. As a kid I played the piano, the trumpet too. At about 13 years of age I picked up one of my dad's guitars, actually I sort of nicked it, and started playing around. I never had guitar lessons though. I did A Level Music and also Music technology, but they wouldn't let me do it on guitar, they said I wasn't good enough. So trumpet was my A Level instrument...but it became a bit of a chore. Guitar was my main interest by then, and I gradually stopped playing everything else.

From that point on I started to play in any band that would have me. I spent many hours in the back of transit vans on motorways, playing small gigs all over the place. Then last year I heard through my dad (who had toured with Hofesh previously) that the company was looking for a guitarist, so I put myself forward. Hofesh needed to hear some of my stuff, so I recorded 8 really loud and nasty guitar pieces and emailed them to him. He liked what he heard and offered me a job playing in the band for his Roundhouse shows. After that he asked me to join the company for the creation and touring of *Political Mother*. This job is a dream come true for me. It's awesome.

ED TROTTER, TECHNICAL PRODUCTION MANAGER

I had for a long time wanted to direct theatre, my parents are huge theatre enthusiasts and I think that all four of their children had their first jobs at our local theatre. At university in Aberdeen I was very involved in the theatre society, mainly directing (and was frankly very scared of having to do anything technical!) but when I moved to London with big (unrealistic) dreams I found that it was very hard to get paid work that let you into a rehearsal room, to learn from people who were doing it.

The one way that it seemed you might get paid a little bit was by pretending you had some technical expertise, and then you could lurk in a corner and pay a lot of attention without being noticed. But as the productions got bigger there was less time to watch and more to do, and to my surprise I found that I began to understand lighting, sound and even a bit about set construction. Not only that but that it was in fact quite interesting.

After a few very scary jobs with very steep learning curves that might easily have ended in disaster, I was recommended as a casual at what was then the The Place Theatre (now Robin Howard Dance Theatre at The Place) and my journey into dance began. It was during my time at The Place that I met Hofesh and Helen, and toured his 2004 piece Cult. And so began my relationship with Hofesh and his work. I was then Technical Manager with CandoCo Dance Company for 5 years, but stayed in touch with Hofesh. I left CandoCo early this year and came to work full time with Hofesh Shechter Company.

All my skills have been learnt on the job and I am still learning. In the world of theatre technicians that I know, I reckon it is about a 50/50 split as to who have had an official training and those who have picked it up as they went along. A lot of the job is about getting on with people, having efficient work practices and being able to get out of trouble when time and money are short. I think you can only really learn by doing and from my point of view the only way to learn how to cope with this is from experience (but then I would say that).

SITA OSTHEIMER – DANCER

Well I followed the usual route really; I danced as a youngster, starting with Ballet classes from the age of 4, went in years of Competitions in Showdance, gave that up at the age of 12 and started to get deeper in Ballet, at the Conservatory and then trained in dance at the Hochschule in Frankfurt at the age 16. (A Hochschule is like your specialist vocational colleges here). After I graduated I danced a lot for companies in Germany, where I am from originally, and then took a job with a company in Holland. After 2 years there I was feeling a little restless. The way I discovered the Hofesh Shechter Company was by chance. A friend showed me a clip on YouTube and I was hooked just watching it, it felt the right step to move on. I thought I want to know more about this choreographer. I learnt a bit more about the company on the internet, and found out when they would next hold an audition. I moved pretty fast, booked a flight and got myself over to the audition. Everything fell in place, because the feeling was right from the second I saw his work. I got the job, the choreographer I was working with at the time realised how important it was for me to work with Hofesh and did let me go before my contract with her even finished...and so I moved to London, everything happened in a very little period of time.

CHRIS EVANS - DANCER

As a youngster I was into Taekwondo, the martial art. I did it for 6 years as a hobby. At secondary school I joined an after school contemporary dance class company for boys. It was led by Andy Thorpe, I guess you could say he was my initial inspiration. The first piece I was involved in with that group was Tai Chi based (another martial art), so I had a really good way into the movement. That really clicked for me. I met a guy called Alex there who was going to audition for London Contemporary Dance School at The Place, and persuaded me to go too. We were both offered places and I trained there for 3 years. Whilst a student there I had the opportunity to see a lot of dance and I realised that contemporary dance could be so broad, the term could mean anything.

Whilst studying there, Hofesh saw me in a piece (he was associate Artist at The Place at the same time that I was a student). He asked me to come and audition for him but I couldn't make it as I had a rehearsal. Bad move...but I like to think I was professional and didn't bail out on my fellow dancers! Later on Hofesh asked me to come and work on a piece he was making, so I guess you could say he auditioned me as we went along.

MERLE HENSEL – COSTUME DESIGNER

I always wanted to do something to do with art/design, but was not quite sure what exactly after I had finished school. My father is an architect and I have always been interested in spatial design, so I did a couple of internships with architects in San Francisco (I had spent an exchange year there when I was 16). I got accepted to study architecture at an art school in Hamburg, Germany, but when I was visiting a friend in London who had just started a foundation course at Central St. Martins. Some students had dropped out due to funding problems so I decided to go for an interview, just for the sake of it actually. I got accepted, called my parents and stayed in London. During my foundation year I got very interested in Theatre Design, applied for the BA there and got in. I then went on to do a Masters as well.

My first design job after I graduated was in Berlin for a couple of short films, then music videos and costume design for a feature film. My first theatre design job was also in Berlin, where I had moved by now. It was a small project for a very interesting space, which is an old derelict ballroom now turned into a performance space. I designed the set and costume for this.

JASON JACOBS, DANCER

Well, as a youngster I was into tap dancing. That was my thing. In upstate New York, where I grew up there was not much opportunity for boys to dance. I moved to a high school in Virginia and started training in ballet. After high school was over I started to dance for different companies in the US and eventually had the opportunity to take part in building a new company with a friend. In 2007 I auditioned and was given the opportunity to go and work in Germany. I ended up staying there for a few years, working with a State Theater in the town of Kassel.

I had heard of Hofesh's work so when the company were in town I went to see a show and take a workshop. In both cases I was blown away. I did the workshop before I saw the performance. It was so challenging physically – such continuing and total movement – but I loved it and wanted to do more. Then at the performance, I was stunned. I just really admired and was inspired by the work. As soon as there was an opportunity, I auditioned for Hofesh. I was delighted to be offered a job with his company. I feel like I'm home.

APPENDIX

USEFUL WEBSITES & SUPPORTING INFORMATION

www.hofesh.co.uk

Further information on the company, interviews with Hofesh, and video & image downloads of his work

www.jamd.ac.il/english

Information on the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, where Hofesh undertook his early training

www.batsheva.co.il

Hofesh danced with this company in Israel. He cites Artistic Director, Ohad Naharin as a key influence in his work

www.youtube.com

Youtube search for footage of the company at various performances

www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_320PSjNok&feature=related

Interview for The Culture Show 2008

www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJj7JB6bP8o

What the audience say. On the spot audience reviews following the first night of the 2008 UK tour

www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGR2XedwX0I

Hofesh created this short piece for popular Channel 4 programme *Skins*

www.theplace.org.uk

Hofesh was Associate Artist here between 2004 and 2006

www.sadlerswells.com

Hofesh is currently Associate Artist

www.brightondome.org

Hofesh Shechter Company are resident here

www.artscouncil.org.uk

Hofesh Shechter Company is an Arts Council RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation)

POLITICAL MOTHER

Commissioners and supporters

www.movimentos.de

Movimentos

www.biennale-de-lyon.org

Biennale de la Danse de Lyon

www.theatredelaville-paris.com

Theatre de la Ville

www.romaeuropa.net

Romaeuropa

www.mercatflors.org

Mercat de les Flors

www.theatreroyal.com

Theatre Royal Plymouth

www.dancexchange.org.uk

DanceXchange

www.gsmd.ac.uk

Guildhall School of Music and Drama

www.barbican.org.uk

The Barbican

Collaborators

www.leecuran.net

Lighting Designer, Lee Curran

www.merlehensel.com

Costume Designer, Merle Hensel

www.artfacts.net/en/artist/fos-10268/artwork/where-there-is-pressure-there-is-folk-dance-16326.html

Image of original sculpture by FOS.

Previews & reviews

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmuAzboo5E4

A short interview with Hofesh about *Political Mother* as part of the Brighton Festival 2010 preview

www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/dance/7725244/Hofesh-Shechter-steps-from-another-dimension.html

www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/the-crouching-tiger-how-israeli-hofesh-shechter-became-the-biggest-beast-in-british-choreography-1971977.html

www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/dance/7749759/Hofesh-Shechters-Political-Mother-at-the-Brighton-Dome-review.html

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/may/23/hofesh-shechter-political-mother-review

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/may/23/political-mother-shechter-babel-cherkaoui

VENUES & MISC

www.theplace.org.uk/juice

The Place's online resource for the professional dance community

www.theplace.org.uk/resolution-2017

The Place's annual, new year open season for shorter dance works

www.theplaceprize.com

The Place Prize commissioned 16 new works to compete for the biggest and most prestigious prize in British contemporary dance

www.roundhouse.org.uk

www.laban.org

One of the world's finest centres for the training of professional contemporary dance artists

www.csm.arts.ac.uk

Central Saint Martins University

www.sophiensaale.com

www.gold.ac.uk

Goldsmiths University

www.lcds.ac.uk/edge

EDge, the postgraduate performance company of London Contemporary Dance School

www.hfmdk-frankfurt.info

INSPIRATION

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcrEqIpi6sg&feature=related

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKQSIH-LLTQ&feature=related

Joni Mitchell singing Both Sides Now in 1970 & 2000

www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk

The works of Stanley Kubrick, a major influence on Hofesh

BANGERS & MASH PROJECT

Bangers and Mash was a project delivered by Hofesh Shechter Company as part of the Brighton Festival 2009. It brought together 10 dance groups from local schools, colleges, universities and youth dance companies, with young bands and musicians from Brighton. Two dancers from the Hofesh Shechter Company worked with each dance group to create a short Hofesh-inspired work, whilst he worked with the musicians to create a music score. In two days Hofesh brought together all 85 performers to make one combined dance and music work, which was performed live at the Brighton Dome Concert Hall.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoyaku8DBgk&feature=related

An insight into the process, and short interviews with some of the participants.

COMPANY INFORMATION & CREDITS

The company offers workshops for young people aged 13+ years. For further information contact us directly on info@hofesh.co.uk

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This pack has been written by dance education specialist Lucy Moelwyn-Hughes in consultation with Hofesh Shechter, Helen Shute and Emily Gorrod.

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Design: Stem Design

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