

## Hofesh Shechter/Political Mother – The Choreographer's Cut

By Sarah Frater

Few predicted Hofesh Shechter's rise from virtual unknown to the choreographic top table but last night he proved once again that his ascendancy has, if anything, been under appreciated.

Israeli-born, British-based Shechter is composer and choreographer. His focus is the uneasy subjects of war and terrorism and political resistance, which are rarely tackled by any of the arts let alone dance. When they are, they come across as preachy and awkward, which lets you off the hook of having to think about them - presumably the reverse of the intended effect.



Shechter keeps us on the hook.

His work has a primal directness without being literal, a powerful combination that stunned many in the audience at Sadler's Wells last night, where his troupe and band performed an extended version of his most recent work, *Political Mother*.

Gloss it is not. The 75-minute show has squatter styling and the shadows of night combat. The 16 dancers wear old clothes, and they move in a combination of Middle Eastern social dance and the shudders of battle. Shechter's ingenious, possibly genius idea is to conflate the disparate repetitions of war with the gestures and ritual of religion. He cleverly segues between the circles of folk dance and panoptic snipers, then hop-skippity moves and the shuffles of shackled prisoners. The close connection between these seeming opposites is crushing, for we innately know that the military march is set to the heartbeat.

Shechter reinforces this circularity by ending the piece with a reverse of the opening sequence, another crushing moment as you realise again the futility and inevitability of war. In between comes rag-taggy group dances that reinvent the choreographic repeat, line up and peel away, of all which Shechter is a master. This expanded version of last year's new show has the musicians set high above the stage like inky angels. The composition, Shechter's own, includes rock, pop, Baroque and the strains of micro-tonal Middle Eastern music. It is an expert synthesis, as is Shechter's choreography, which sets the black dog of death at our door. Everyone else looks like try-hard glamour groupies.