

## “Why does history repeat itself, in dance and in society?”

“History repeats itself”, and never before has this infamous quote been more relevant than in today’s society. Whilst the earlier developments in the Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain has witnessed practitioners addressing the social issues of LGBTQ issues in the early 2000s by Sir Matthew Bourne, followed by Akram Khan’s and Shobana Jeyasingh’s explorations of socio-cultural issues in the mid 2000s, and then the 2010s aggressively addressing the political climate with Hofesh Shechter’s and Jasmin Vardimon’s work, the mid-to-late 2010s have seen a shift into historical contexts for their works, and today it is important to see why – these moments need to be learned from.

Nowadays, with the strength of reality television, it’s clear to see the inspiration behind Hofesh Shechter’s *Clowns* (2016) for Shechter2. This work explores the state of the entertainment industry by referencing court jesters from the Middle Ages and Tudor period, presenting violence for pleasure in a tongue-in-cheek manner alongside Shechter’s eerie and intense flexed-footed walks. Whilst Shechter uses humour to engage his audience, it also highlights the current state of affairs by drawing parallels between the historical slaves for entertainment, to today’s extreme violence in films and TV series’ whereby the public delight in others’ misfortune. This concept allows the wider audience to reflect on the state of the industry, and on their own perceptions and involvement within that: Shechter has since been provided a huge platform for this work to be performed for the BBC, where the piece was reimaged for camera with Nederlands Danz Theater (2018). This has allowed Shechter’s social and historical statement to reach a wider audience nationally within Britain, therefore causing the British audience to reconsider the way in which they view the misfortune of others.

In line with this, Jasmin Vardimon is renowned for her ability to challenge her audience’s perceptions of the world through her experience as a psychological analyst. Through works like *Park* (2005) and *Justitia* (2008), Vardimon has been known to tackle social issues such as climate change and the state of the judiciary system, however it is with her more recent works *Pinocchio* (2017) and *Medusa* (2018) where Vardimon uses well known stories throughout history and harnesses the wider contextual issues surrounding them. For example, in an interview with Vardimon when questioned about her thought process behind *Medusa*, she stated that she was interested in the “forgotten story” in which Medusa was raped by Poseidon and then punished by Athena. Vardimon then goes on to draw parallels between the current “me too” movement and acknowledging that throughout history, the imagery of Medusa has been used to silence strong women, like the presidential campaign in 2016 whereby Donald Trump posed as Perseus whilst holding the head of Hilary Clinton as Medusa. This concept is realised through the motif whereby the character of Medusa is sat in a turned-out full plié, with her hands gestured to shapes like talons, resting on her knees but turned up to claw up at the ceiling, making the character appear deadly to those above her, yet sexually exposed. This is particularly poignant and indicative of how history has a way of repeating itself, with historical references informing the present day. In addition, it is a well-known story, however the infamous “truth” behind the concept of Medusa is rather harrowing, and would certainly evoke self-reflection whilst encouraging audiences to bring awareness to these modern issues.

To mark the centenary of World War 1 in 2018, 14-18 NOW commissioned works by Akram Khan and Shobana Jeyasingh to commemorate this well-known period in history. Whilst Khan created *Xenos* (and the shorter dance for camera version *Xen*), which depicts the culturally lesser-known involvement of India and emphasising the “World” in WW1, meanwhile Jeyasingh produced

Contagion, which actually focuses on the worldwide pandemic of the Spanish Influenza of 1918. Xenos and Xen are historical, not only with regards to the WW1 context, but additionally with the inclusion of reprises of Khan's prior works, to mark his solo performance swansong: any member of the public who has been a fan of Khan since his earlier creations would recognise the sharp kathak-inspired gestural motifs from Rush (2000), whilst Khan would beat his chest with his hands before galloping on a linear pathway; alongside the acceleration and deceleration within controlled and precise chainè turns horizontally across the stage, clearly from Khan's collaboration with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Antony Gormley and Nitin Sawhney in Zero Degrees (2005). Xenos therefore comes full circle, not only with the centenary but also within the context of his professional performance career. The same can be said for Xen, as it is a work for camera, much like one of his original works Loose in Flight (1999) prior to the genesis of his self-titled company in 2000: Akram Khan Company. Meanwhile Jeyasingh's work Contagion exploded onto the scene, not only because of its raw and engaging choreography, where the dancers were completely exposed with grotesque facial expressions, but it also became widely available to world as it was recorded live for Youtube from the Great Hall, Winchester, and has been available for the public to view ever since. Like Khan's work, Jeyasingh received Digital Dance Awards for her works Miniatures (1988) and Speaking of Satki (1990), therefore she has come full circle in terms of reprising her own history within the genre. However, Jeyasingh's Contagion is now more prominent than she could ever have predicted, as we are now experiencing a global pandemic unlike any other that we have seen for generations: COVID-19. This is of course completely coincidental, Jeyasingh could never have predicted this international crisis, but it does highlight how history repeats itself, no matter how advanced our technology is. Jeyasingh described the 1918 contagion as a response to WW1: scientifically speaking, people's immune systems were far weaker owing to the impact that the war had on the countries around the works; however, socio-politically speaking, the epidemic almost seemed like a response to the chaos and violence that humans had inflicted upon the world... It was as if the biology of the Earth was retaliating against the human race. Nowadays, the same could be said for the current global pandemic, as the Coronavirus has caused China to significantly lower their carbon footprint, having a negative impact on the human race, but a positive impact upon the Earth.

Overall, the present day ICDSB practitioners have embarked upon a trend of referencing historical issues, having explored social, political and cultural ideas in the earlier years of the genre. Whilst there are many factors that have encouraged this, such as marking specific moments in history as a method of remembrance, and to reflect upon their own history as a choreographer, one of the most poignant features is drawing parallels between historical events and current occurrences. Whether mythical, from ancient Greek mythology resembling Medusa, or factual, from moments in history such as the court jesters from the Middle Ages in Clowns, and marking the WW1 centenary within Xenos/Xen and Contagion, they all have a common denominator: they are all relevant in today's society, and should be learnt from. Practitioners such as Hofesh Shechter, Jasmin Vardimon, Akram Khan and Shobana Jeyasingh all make statements on stage, and seek a wide range of media platforms to present these to the British public. In doing so, the choreographers ensure that each work provides an educational experience that is intellectually stimulating, relevant, inspiring and meaningful, to encourage the audience to apply and reflect upon that education to change the world for the better.

## “How can we remove patriarchy within dance companies?”

The Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain (ICDSB) is renowned for its response to socio-political issues and referencing historical events within a modern context. A key example of this is the work of both Shobana Jeyasingh and Jasmin Vardimon, both of whom are representing females within a male dominated industry, and both of whom are doing everything in their power to abolish this imbalance within the genre, begging the question: “How can we remove patriarchy within dance companies?”

Jeyasingh’s work for her company, Shobana Jeyasingh Company, demonstrates her chameleon ability to work through many dance styles and choreographic intentions: her Indian heritage encouraged the use of a fusion of dance styles within her work, such as her contemporary, capoeira and Barathanatyam blend in *Faultline* (2007), and her wholly unique mixture of breakdance and contemporary in *Material Men* (2015). The opening of *Faultline* clearly conveys Jeyasingh’s interest in Pakistani gang culture in London, as the captivating video by Peter Gomes demonstrates youths wandering around Southall and Brick Lane, followed by three males on stage performing Indian gestures that further enhance the intention, such as the aggressive beats to the chest to show violence and intimidation alongside the casual “smoking” gestures. Whilst this may have been in line with the trends in the earlier decade of the genre, like that of the work Akram Khan has created, this Indian-contemporary fusion then became normalised and expected by audiences.

Jeyasingh’s clear interest in experimental dance resulted in her unusual fusion of breakdance with Indian dance in the latter decade, with *Material Men*’s debut securing Jeyasingh as one of the leading choreographer’s for insightful stylistic fusion on a grander scale than before. Her work with universities allowed for more experimentation with physical setting and film, which she was clearly interested in from the premiere of *Faultline* however she had not necessarily created dance works of a site-sensitive, film-specific nature for a long period of time. Enter *Contagion* (2018), a jaw-dropping piece of contemporary dance, which was performed at the Winchester Great Hall and co-commissioned by 14-18 NOW to commemorate World War 1’s centenary. Not only was the movement content incredibly unique, from the contorted body shapes of the dancers to their uncomfortable and grotesque facial expressions, but it also demonstrated how Jeyasingh’s collaboration with researchers and her dancers was instrumental in her style developing yet again, incorporating contact borne of clear improvisation in the studio to create daring and intricate manipulations of the human body. These manipulations clearly communicate Jeyasingh’s scientific exploration of the mutation of the Spanish influenza virus, alongside her artistic research and interlinking of music and dance as an art installation. Through this movement content, it is easy to see how Jeyasingh’s work with her dancers has allowed for extremely strong and accomplished females to challenge the audience’s knowledge of gender capabilities, a subject that has been close to Jeyasingh’s heart since her *Faultline* days. Therefore, Jeyasingh’s success with the reviews was off the charts, and was amplified by the fact that this work was filmed live on Youtube and is therefore available to a mass audience worldwide, bringing in more fans of her work and demonstrating female capabilities of physicality, coupled with Jeyasingh’s incredibly intellectual approach to this commemorative piece.

Continuing with the theme of formidable females, Jasmin Vardimon is another choreographer of whom her powerful intentions behind her dance works has been instrumental to the success of her company: Jasmin Vardimon Company. Vardimon’s background as a psychological interviewer, alongside her experiences in the Israeli military and as a trained gymnast, has resulted in

pieces of a daring yet intellectually detailed nature. Works such as Park (2005), Justitia (2008) and 7734 (2010) demonstrated her interest in the human condition from the earlier decade of the genre, each posing questions for the audience to encourage self-reflection and to change our social climate for the better. Park explores different human's interacting in the title location "the park", exploring human perceptions of homelessness and protest; whilst Justitia breaks the fourth wall and invites the audience in as a jury, encouraging them to make their own judgements on the crime-based narrative, and pulling into question the state of the judiciary system. Then came the far darker 7734, a work that pulls the audience into a dystopia of an alternate ending to World War 2, creating "hell on earth" and pulling into the spotlight the "inhumanity" of the human race. All of these works kickstarted the success of Jasmin Vardimon Company with her risk-taking physical theatre style that incorporates her physical gymnastics strength and stamina, spoken word from the dancers and an overall clear stylistic quality to her company.

Like Jeyasingh, in the latter decade Vardimon began experimenting with site-sensitive dance, creating Maze (2015), a piece which involved an elaborate set of carefully constructed foam and string of which the dancers would play around on, removing clothes, falling from great heights to be caught in the foam and running throughout the created maze. This piece invited her audience into the stage, the only logical step forward given Vardimon's existing experience with breaking the fourth wall. In an interview, Vardimon explained that she intended for the audience to see the work from their own point of view, encouraging their own interpretations and experiences of the work as they walked around, chose where to go and decided which angle to watch the action from. Again, after this experimental stint of having created her own narrative and having the audience create theirs, Vardimon then decided to use existing narratives as her starting points for both Pinocchio (2017) and Medusa (2018), much like the work of Sir Matthew Bourne. Medusa in particular utilises a historical Greek myth as the stimulus, but focuses on the "untold" socio-political context that is particularly relevant in today's society. In an interview with Vardimon, she explains that the forgotten story of Medusa being an innocent beauty, being raped by Poseidon and then punished by Athena, connotes modern day notions in line with victim blaming and the "Me Too" movement in contemporary society; additionally stating that the Donald Trump's 2016 Presidential election campaign, which featured Trump as Perseus holding the head of Hilary Clinton as Medusa, confirms how even today the notion and imagery of Medusa is being used to "silence strong women". This untold and forgotten narrative encourages the audience to see the story from two sides, understanding the reasoning behind the commonly told tale and encouraging the audience to consider the anti-feminist connotations in present day society. Whilst the starting point of the dance is an existing story, it is clear that Vardimon has explored the conceptual ideas in modern society as her main intention, and as her historical narratives are still relevant in our present day socio-political climate, Vardimon clearly wants to see changes made in the way women are treated throughout the world. These ideas are illuminating and showcase Vardimon as an intellectual, strong female inspiring the next generation of choreographers; her JV2 company being a clear example of this, where Vardimon trains professional dancers in the art of performance and choreography, and they are able to learn how to approach their movement and their concepts in the intellectual and experimental manner that Vardimon does.

Largely, the practitioners for the ICDSB are renowned for their capacity to reflect and challenge our society, responding to socio-political, cultural and historical events that impact the present day. The genre has developed so much, as a result of, in the earlier decade of the genre, fighting for LGBTQ rights in the case of Sir Matthew Bourne, banishing Islamophobia in the case of

Akram Khan, and addressing the political climate throughout the world, in the case of Israeli born Hofesh Shechter. The most prominent revelation within the last five years is the celebration of historical events, owing to the WW1 centenary amongst a general interest in past events, as even in the present day, past events seem more relevant than ever and can serve as a warning to not revert back to old ways and fascist views. In the case of the development of the industry, all choreographers are important in developing the calibre of our British dancers, but the females in the industry in particular value the importance of gender equality and female power, developing the next generation of female dancers and choreographers to try to bring balance to this patriarchal structure so often seen in dance companies. Jeyasingh and Vardimon are instrumental in these changes, and I have no doubt that their highly intellectual work and legacies will continue to see a shift in female directors, choreographers, Prime Ministers, Queens, CEOs, and many other powerful positions. I look forward to seeing what they accomplish next, and in the meantime will do my part to convey the true meaning of feminism: equality across both genders, within dance and within life.

Ms A. Rider - 2019

### “Are gender stereotypes supported or abolished in the dance industry?”

The issue of gender within dance causes such controversy that the differences in opinion can be very stark: on one hand, dance is seen as a “feminine” pastime which can make it difficult for young boys to feel comfortable in such an environment; whereas conversely, males represent a large proportion of artistic directors in dance companies, such as Matthew Bourne’s “New Adventures” and Hofesh Shechter’s self titled company, therefore creates a sense of patriarchy within the discipline. Regardless, the issue of gender stereotypes are being recognised and challenged within the present day Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain, by female choreographers such as Shobana Jeyasingh alongside the aforementioned male practitioners, therefore it is interesting to recognise how far the dance industry has come on the topic of gender.

Decades ago, companies including Ballet Rambert retained the idea of a prima ballerina, a female lead dancer, until the 1960s when the issue of gender began to change drastically alongside the concept and development of dance. Women became much more sexually liberal and men became more vain, and the notions of peace, love and acceptance were echoed around the world. Since then, patriarchy within dance companies became clear, as it involved more males within the industry, however on stage the notion of male dancers remained as “strong” and in support of females within pas-de-deux lifts. In 1995, Matthew Bourne premiered his exciting, original recreation of Swan Lake at Sadler’s Wells, which saw an all-male cast as the corps de ballet and with a homosexual relationship between the male prima ballerina as the lead swan, and his love interest the prince. Fast forward to 2018, Swan Lake was reimagined and brought to the world stage once more, allowing audiences to reminisce over the 1995 strong statement that Bourne made, that shook the dance industry and caused it to rethink their perceptions on gender. In an interview for the BBC, Bourne stated that he wished for his audience to see both the strength and grace of male dancers through beautifully slow and controlled arabesques and poised heads directed towards downstage left, and forced the earlier audiences to rethink their notions of gender in dance alongside their view on sexuality. As a homosexual himself, Bourne has often demonstrated connotations of a range of sexualities within his work, and this has since seen huge changes in the laws and rights to the LGBTQ+ community since. But does this movement support or negate gender stereotypes within dance? The answer is: both. Whilst the all-male cast demonstrates that males

are able command a stage sans females, it does support the femininity associated with males in dance, and could therefore be harmful to the young male dancers' mindsets in the present day. It is easy to see how important Swan Lake was to moving into the current ICDSB genre, however it is now out-dated and requires a new way of enforcing gender equality within the dance industry.

Enter Shobana Jeyasingh, whose self titled Shobana Jeyasingh Dance has been around for as long as Bourne's original company "Adventures in Motion Picture" in the late 1980s. Jeyasingh has always been experimental with dance, and her approach to gender issues is no exception. In 2007, Faultline's premiere allowed her audiences to witness Jeyasingh's intricate fusion of Barathanatyam and contemporary, whilst depicting an episodic view on gang culture and city life within the London boroughs of Southall and Brixton. Where Bourne demonstrated grace, Jeyasingh demonstrated this with far more strength and physicality, with jaw dropping slow and controlled transitions throughout lifts that demonstrated immense strength, power and flexibility. This was further heightened by the inclusion of females within contact, where the men and women all lifted each other and there was nothing to discern them apart from their costumes of skirts versus trousers. This was a powerful movement as it showed both females and men as strong characters, and turned the concept of gender stereotypes on its head whilst keeping the feminine male dancer typecasts firmly at bay. Moving on to the present day, Jeyasingh has since condensed her company down to an all female cast for her 2018 piece "Contagion", much like Bourne's statement in 1995 and revival in 2018. Whilst Bourne was reimagining his all-male cast, Jeyasingh was presenting her incredibly strong female dancers performing repertoire that showed off their physicality, but also eliminated the aesthetic stereotype whilst directing her dancers into contorted positions with grotesque faces to embody the Spanish Influenza of 1918. Jeyasingh's Contagion in the present day therefore promoted herself as an intelligent and independent matriarch alongside her strong, resilient dancers, and certainly caused her audiences to view females differently within the dance community.

Whilst it is clear that the movement away from gender stereotypes has been addressed, the issue of boys involvement in dance has been difficult: whilst women have found it easy to move into a gender neutral role, there is an element of social stigma that presents itself as the most difficult issue to move on from. It's been clear that males involved in breakdance and hip hop are widely appreciated in today's society, and males who are in touch with their feminine sides have found it easy to access projects such as the Ballet Boyz and Matthew Bourne's Lord of the Flies, it can be difficult to get males involved in contemporary dance. Hofesh Shechter is one of the pioneers determined to change this. After the premiere of his first work "Fragments" in 2003, Shechter developed his own style and presented this in Uprising in 2006, which featured an all male cast of 7 dancers and utilised a raw masculine energy, depicting animalistic crawls and strong, unified floor work to demonstrate toxic masculinity at its best. This competitive piece was then echoed with 2009's The Art of Not Looking Back, with 6 females to act as the counterpoint to his 2006 work. Shechter's females, from the founding of Hofesh Shechter Company in 2008, performed with the same animalistic spirit, with elements of technicality and elegance not demonstrated in the all-male uprising, but with a section of rhythmic walks forwards that certainly draws a clear parallel between this 2009 piece and its 2006 equivalent. Since these works, Shechter has gone on to gain critically acclaimed success within Political Mother (2010) and then far more recently Clowns (2016 for Shechter2) and Grand Finale (2017). All of these more recent works have featured Shechter's distinctive groove and rhythm alongside whole-body totality, and has demonstrated his male and female dancers as equals within his companies, all performing with an air of strength and animalistic rigour,

whilst retaining an element of grace. Shechter's work has certainly changed the dance scene as we know it, and his demonstrations of equality within genders have been no exception to this.

Whilst all three choreographers have made headlines through their depictions of gender, there are elements that can be harmful to the issue of gender stereotypes, in society and within dance. Whilst it's important to give males more opportunities to become involved within dance, it's clear that Bourne's perceptions can seem obsolete in the present day, given that the genre is trying to move away from stereotyping male dancers in one broad stroke. In addition, Jeyasingh's involvement within the sector has been monumental in turning the tide away from patriarchy, however this does not necessarily support the issue of involving males within dance, as this is clearly the gap in the industry given how many females fight for places, and how many males are in uptake of dance as a discipline. In saying this, it is clear that choreographers such as Hofesh Shechter are instrumental in changing the world's perceptions on gender stereotypes in society, as exhibited in his earlier works in the genre, however it is Shechter's more recent efforts that have made it enticing for young males to follow a pathway into contemporary dance, regardless of their background. One thing is for certain: whilst we have made excellent headway over the past 20 years, and the 40 years prior to this, we still have a way to go. I look forward to seeing the genre developing once again into a discipline of total equality, where women and men can both succeed as leaders, and with equal opportunities that celebrate diversity, individuality and community as performers.

Ms A. Rider - 2020

#### "Are British dancers outclassed on the world stage?"

"Are British dancers really outclassed on the world stage?" The Guardian posed this provocative question in 2015, after a controversial statement delivered by renowned practitioners Akram Khan and Hofesh Shechter which supported their reasoning for British dancers culminating the minority within their independent companies, Akram Khan Company and Hofesh Shechter Company respectively. This argument between dancers, choreographers and academics within the dance scene has resulted in the development of youth programmes for both companies, and has certainly shaped the way in which they provide opportunities within Britain in the present day.

Akram Khan, arguably the Godfather of the Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain (ICDSB), founded Akram Khan Company in London in 2000 when the genre originated. From its inception, Khan's company has produced endless works and has enabled Khan to work both independently and collaboratively with an eclectic range of artists. *Rush*, his first piece for the company in 2000, was far more abstract and conceptual than his later works, as the genre has moved on through time and has developed beyond this pedestrian style. The year 2000 saw a shift from postmodern dance into the current fusion of styles and disciplines that we see nowadays, and Khan was certainly a key catalyst for this with his trademark contemporary-Kathak fusion. As we journey through his works, such as *Ma* (2004) and *Vertical Road* (2010), we continue to see Khan's works utilising the physicality of his dancers, and in 2005 and 2008, we witness *Zero Degrees* and *Sacred Monsters* depicting emotive and expressive dances with high profile collaborators, such as Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Sylvie Guillem respectively. With the exception of *Vertical Road*, the common denominator connecting these pieces is that of

Khan himself performing, which remains a theme up until his final swansong performance in 2019. His precision and emotion on stage certainly justifies his decision to perform in his own works, explains why he achieved the highest ranking marks in his BA at Northern School of Contemporary Dance, and certainly qualifies him as an experienced judge in the issues communicated on the calibre of dancers in Britain today.

However, the greatest importance isn't on the issue itself, but what we do to resolve it. In 2012, Khan was invited to choreograph on 50 youth dancers for the opening ceremony of the London Olympics, which allowed Khan and the young dancers involved to perform on an international stage, at perhaps the most iconic and famous performance in the world. This of course gave Khan himself global recognition, but clearly his work with the young dancers only strengthened his 2015 view on the rigour of British dance training. As a result, Khan has created many training and performance opportunities, with a particular focus on Indian styles of dance Kathak and Barathanatyam, which emphasises the sharp, embellished hand gestures, coordinated use of various, intricate parts of the feet to create sound, and controlled yet accelerated pivot and chaines turns. This need for precision and control in a very coordinated manner leads me to believe that the issue at hand isn't perhaps with the depth of training, but in the breadth of training in our dancers, as they have to perform technically in a diverse range of styles. Khan's annual "Darbaar Festival", an accumulation of Indian dance works by up-and-coming choreographers, celebrates the cultural styles on the nationally acclaimed Sadler's Wells stage, and brings in a wider audience as the style is celebrated by British audiences, also placing more emphasis on a diverse range of styles in our current multicultural Britain. Nowadays, we can see Akram Khan Company retaining his trademark contemporary-Kathak fusion, and with his most recent solo *Xenos* (2018) marking the swansong of his solo performance career. This will allow him to focus far more on the directing of the younger generations embarking on their careers within dance, and hopefully will encourage Khan to enforce his principles on conservatoires, such as Trinity Laban, London Contemporary Dance School, and the institution which he trained at himself: Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

Conversely, Hofesh Shechter is a far more recent addition to the ICDSB, and although he has a longstanding career in performance and choreography in the earlier decade of the genre, he has exploded onto the scene in the most recent decade. It is interesting to note that Shechter has a completely different history to Khan in terms of training and experiences, given Shechter's performance work with Batsheva and Jasmin Vardimon Company before founding Hofesh Shechter Company in 2008, after the success of his initial works such as *Fragments* (2003) and *Uprising* (2006). Intriguingly, the 3 year gap between these two works allowed for Shechter to develop his own trademark "animalistic" style, moving away from the Vardimon-inspired *Fragments*, which involved contrasting sections and incorporated the fluid qualities that we experience in release technique. In 2006 Shechter had refocused towards a raw, gritty movement style in which the all-male cast of dancers appear like monkeys, crawling through the floor and with uncomfortable moments of stillness. Similarly, *The Art of Not Looking Back* (2009) features that same style rife with whole body totality, however with far more precision from the female cohort of dancers. The pivotal moment in Shechter's career however occurred in the turn of the new decade with *Political Mother* (2010), with Shechter's well-developed courageous style coupled with his own performance contribution, featuring Hofesh Shechter himself as a "Rock God", playing the politician who spouts incoherent, guttural screams and with his large cast of dancers blindly following him to the groove and rhythm of his own score. Shechter's inclusion of himself in his work provided a level of hierarchy to his piece both literally and metaphorically, as it allowed the audience to see a clear relationship but also encouraged the



audience to come and watch the famous Shechter. It also highlighted Shechter's multi-talent, as he had been composing his own music from his Uprising days, and made this fact obvious by presenting himself as one of the musicians on stage.

Since then, Hofesh Shechter's work has only continued to grow in fame, bringing in many more audience members for his company and more opportunities for outreach within the wider community. Since the 2015 claim against British dancers, Shechter has taken a different approach to Khan in terms of strategies to improve the training of dancers: he has created Shechter2, a foundation level company to complement Hofesh Shechter Company that trains and eventually feeds into Hofesh Shechter Company; and he has created opportunities such as East Wall in 2018, a creative opportunity for young budding choreographers and for youth level dancers to perform at the Tower of London. Both of these opportunities provide Shechter-style training for young dancers, and as a result I feel that Shechter is committed to the development of young British dancers. East Wall for instance not only enabled young dancers to watch the rehearsals and performance of Clowns (originally 2016) by Shechter2, with their energy and emotion demonstrated through the comic bouncy skips and eerie jazz hands in unison, but also enabled them to learn movement content from Political Mother as the finale, throwing their arms up into the air wildly with a rigid-meets-uncontrollably-floppy dynamic that only Shechter himself could bring out of his dancers. This whole experience proves the positive impact Shechter's youth opportunities are having on the communities within East London, as it has provided a clear pathway and inspiration for budding performers and choreographers, and also set the precedent for the level of training and professionalism required of those dancing for Shechter. Much like the technical issues with Akram Khan Company, Hofesh Shechter Company demands a very specific style and skill set, with dancers being encouraged to improvise, understand music on a whole new level, and with extreme physicality and confidence to perform such animalistic movement content. Shechter's expanding companies all seem to have the same ethos, as Clowns (2016) for Shechter2 and Grand Finale (2017) for Hofesh Shechter Company are both reminiscent of the theme of entertainment, and involve very tongue-in-cheek performances to highlight the lengths entertainment companies will go to for publicity. This proves that aside from ability and experience, the companies are very united as a part of the Hofesh Shechter "brand", and demonstrates the continued growth and reach of Shechter's independent company.

Given the stylistic demands that both choreographers place on their dancers, this suggests that the issue isn't necessarily an overall incompetence in dance, but actually the breadth of stylistic experience that our British dancers have been exposed to and are technically proficient in. Whilst Akram Khan is drawing attention to this by providing our multicultural Britain with performances, exposing them to the styles of Indian dance, Hofesh Shechter is instead focusing on practically training young dancers in his very distinctive style, trying to prepare the future generations both before and after their professional training. It is worth mentioning that conservatoires such as Trinity Laban, London School of Contemporary Dance and Northern Contemporary Dance School all retaliated to the claims made by Shechter and Khan, by asserting that dancers who undergo professional training will embark on a multitude of careers, including but not limited to teachers, journalists, dance movement psychotherapists, dance scientists and indeed, choreographers themselves. This statement, coupled with the conclusion that the choreographers are speaking out from a very stylistically niche point of view, alludes to the fact that although Khan and Shechter are making steps to rectify the root of the problem in the current decade of the genre, the wider context means that dancers are not just training to become dancers, but for their overall passion and appreciation for the subject; to become practitioners in a

wide range of positions within the Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain in the present day.

Ms A. Rider - 2020

“Does technology help or hinder dance in the public eye?”

Technology: the resource of the future, and within the dance industry this is no exception, though this does encourage one to wonder if the advances in technology help or hinder dance in the perception of the public eye. As the internet and social media continues to pick up pace, as it has become widely available and somewhat integral to society, practitioners within the Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain (ICDSB) have embraced and utilised this in the much more recent years of the genre: from Akram Khan’s work for Sadler’s Wells digital stage; alongside Hofesh Shechter’s experimentation of reimagining dance for camera for the BBC; to Shobana Jeyasingh’s forward thinking site-sensitive performances available live on Youtube. 2018 to the present day in 2020 has enabled choreographers to reach a wider audience, and to draw upon the post-modern fashion of exploring dance for camera in a contemporary context.

Whilst choreographers such as Matthew Bourne and Jasmin Vardimon have commissioned their works for DVD release throughout the birth of the genre in 2000 onwards, and even prior to this, what has become clear is the artistic development for camera as time has progressed. Akram Khan for instance choreographed *Xenos* (2018) as his final solo performance, his swansong as he prepares to embark on a more directorial role in his works. *Xenos* was awe-inspiring, not just because of the incredibly interactive physical setting of soil, a long rope and a megaphone with a spotlight inside that pans across the audience, but also because of the notable reprises within the climactic section: any member of the public who has been a fan of Khan since his earlier creations would recognise the sharp kathak-inspired gestural motifs from *Rush* (2000), whilst Khan would beat his chest with his hands before galloping on a linear pathway; alongside the acceleration and deceleration within controlled and precise chainés turns horizontally across the stage, clearly from Khan’s collaboration with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Antony Gormley and Nitin Sawhney in *Zero Degrees* (2005). It is interesting therefore, that Akram Khan then condensed his feature length work into an eerie and intense 8 minute piece for camera entitled *Xen* (also 2018), utilising small sections of exploration from the beginning of the original *Xenos* and fast-forwarding to the climax with the reprises. *Xen*, like *Xenos*, was commissioned by Sadler’s Wells, whom Khan is an Associate Artist for, however the filmed work is constantly available on their Digital Stage platform, thus making it widely accessible for audiences. This choice is very forward thinking for both Akram Khan and Sadler’s Wells, as it immortalises Khan’s solo performance throughout history, with respect to his extensive career as a performer himself, and brings us back full circle from one of his very first pieces “*Loose in Flight*” (1999) which was a solo dance for camera, created prior to the founding of his self-titled Akram Khan Company in 2000. In addition, the release of *Xen* on the Digital Stage enables audiences around the world to have access to Khan’s work, to the delight of those global fans of Khan’s work for the 2012 Olympic Ceremony, and offers a free work to the people within Britain who perhaps do not have the funds or the means to visit a theatre in person.

Hofesh Shechter is renowned for abolishing audiences’ perceptions of dance in the present day, and brings a fresh new style to his audiences unlike any other in dance history across the globe. Having built up his independent self-named company since 2008, Hofesh Shechter Company, Shechter’s works have become available in small clips on his company’s Vimeo page, including snippets from *Fragments* (2003) which is more akin to his performance work

with Jasmin Vardimon Company and Batsheva, alongside *Uprising* (2006), *The Art of Not Looking Back* (2009), and *Political Mother* (2010), which are all key in demonstrating his development into the raw, gritty stylistic movement content that Shechter is so famously known for. Similar to Khan, Hofesh Shechter reimagined one of his works for camera - *Clowns* (originally 2016 for Shechter2) for the BBC with Nederlands Danz Theater in 2018. The original *Clowns* was created for stage performance and featured a very tongue-in-cheek representation of the entertainment industry, using jazz hands which, coupled with Shechter's abstract use of the torso and extremely slow and fast dynamics, created an eerie atmosphere that takes his audience on an enticing journey of a thriller-meets-comedy. Shechter's younger company then performed the work again in the summer of 2018 for *East Wall*, a collaboration of communities in East London culminating in a performance on the Tower of London stage, which seemed to be a prequel for what was soon to come. In September of 2018, it was then announced that Shechter was reimagining the work for camera, which was to be broadcasted on BBC Two before being available for 30 days afterwards on BBC iPlayer. The work differed from the point of view of the camera, as it enabled the audience to see close ups of dancers faces, pan around their bodies, and focus on the intricate details within his work. Shechter stated in an interview that his reimagining had to focus on viewpoint, alongside highlighting his long-standing collaborator and lighting designer Lee Curran's vision, which is evident during the "tap" section, whereby the dancers mime crashing symbols out towards downstage left just as a spotlight from this corner abruptly illuminates the dancers faces. *Clowns* reimagining was truly exciting as a huge fan of Shechter's work, as not only was the work available to watch at my own leisure, but additionally the rest of Britain would be introduced to contemporary dance through Shechter's ideologies, and this would certainly garner more publicity, wider audiences, and funding for the genre. Since then, Shechter has placed a section on his website to receive more funding through donations from the public, as he states that his works can cost upwards of £250,000 to create, therefore the move to create work for the BBC was a clever one from both a financial point of view alongside being able to convey a social statement on a national platform.

Conversely, Shobana Jeyasingh has been experimenting with site-sensitive dances for camera for some time, and perhaps influenced other practitioners in the genre with this. Jeyasingh founded her self-titled company, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, in 1988, and has therefore been working within the industry for far longer than that of Khan and Shechter. Throughout this extensive period, Jeyasingh has experimented with many changes throughout contemporary dance, moving from the post-modern era of digital dance works for camera in the 1990's, to the birth of the Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain in 2000-present day. During the genesis of her company, Shobana Jeyasingh won multiple Digital Dance Awards for her works *Miniatures* (1988) and *Speaking of Satki* (1990), before moving on to experiment with a contemporary-Barathanatyam fusion during the earlier decade of the ICDSB, with works such as *Faultline* (2007) and *Material Men* (2015), both of which fused her Indian precise gestures with splaying of the fingers to create a narrative, which combined contact and breakdance respectively. As we moved into the latter decade however, Jeyasingh began experimenting with dance for camera and site-sensitive dance as part of her research and development with university institutions: *Trespass R&D* (2015) is a collaboration between Shobana Jeyasingh Dance, the Department of Informatics, Faculty of Natural and Mathematical Sciences at Kings College London, and The Bartlett School of Architecture from University College London (UCL). This piece explores the creative and emotional impulses with which humans would interact with the architecture and structures around us, and was performed at the Anatomy Museum at Kings College London, with the dancers replicating the robotic movements of the structures around them.

Whilst this piece explores technology itself, Jeyasingh then explored further by creating her dance-art exhibition Contagion (2018), which presents a site-sensitive display of the scientific concepts behind the historical Spanish Influenza epidemic from 2018, funded by 14-18 NOW to mark the centenary of the First World War. This piece exploded onto the scene, not only because of its raw and engaging choreography, where the dancers were completely exposed with grotesque facial expressions, but it also became widely available to world as it was recorded live for Youtube from the Great Hall, Winchester, and has been available for the public to view ever since. To follow up, Jeyasingh created Staging Schiele (2019), having come across Schiele's fascinating art work when researching the Spanish Influenza, and presented his sexually provocative work visually with the dancers removing clothes and creating explicit positions in their bodies. Again, this was recorded live for Youtube and has been available to view ever since. Shobana Jeyasingh has clearly never been afraid to experiment with digital theatre, as her earlier work and awards suggest, and it's interesting to recognise that Jeyasingh has clearly gone back to her roots, having explored other elements of contemporary dance fusion before embracing the power of social media in today's day and age.

The Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain clearly has not moved on as such, but has come full circle. Much like the fashion industry, old trends are reappearing through the use of dance for camera that is reminiscent of the postmodern trend in the 1990s, and this is clearly evident through Jeyasingh's and Khan's work as they have both reverted back to this movement. It is, however, executed with a twist, as of course technology and the internet have moved on exponentially since then in terms of speed, accessibility and through the power of social media, therefore all 3 of these practitioners have used this to their advantage to gain publicity, such as Shechter's work for the BBC and Khan's work for the Olympic Ceremony. Nowadays, it's more important for the general public to be an audience for the exceptional creative work that British companies are exuding, as opposed to the viral dances that we see on TikTok or Youtube. All of this eludes to the development of these practitioners as artists, finding new ways of creating and developing from the past, but additionally it creates opportunities for social media and the media in general to engage with a wider audience, and ultimately provide growth for these independent companies as they become bigger, gain fame and are more financially stable.

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