A Choreographed Massacre: Hofesh Shechter’s ‘Clowns’

By Mia L

An emptied ballroom, a stark drumbeat and ten ominous figures: Hofesh Shechter’s ‘Clowns’ is a violent aesthetic.

In a blur of anarchy, we watch as ten figures evolve into fully fleshed animals, fighting without relent. Based upon the implications of attempting to attain popularity of the highest calibre, we are made to query how far humans will stretch for entertainment.

Shechter’s power is in identity- ‘Clowns’ simply does not hear rules. Traditional dancing restraints are pushed-off and leapt-over as there’s a tireless feel of action without regret. Danced to a haunting musical chant, reminiscent of time-old tribal heritage, we question: who is in control?

‘Clowns’ is both aesthetic and harrowing. We watch as bodies struggle, die and murder, yet we are still made to feel calm and engaged. Trapped within the four walls of the beautifully stark Rivoli ballroom, we become slaves to the constant soundtrack, blinded by the immersive glow of back lighting.

Relationships are so easily broken; they are discarded before even formed. The interconnections between the dancers are so highly intricate yet lack all emotion- it’s each body for itself.

There is an intense confusion of power and a constant shift of control- no dancer is ceaselessly in authority. Shechter presents each dancer as an individual, a faceless character, motivated by a hot-headed obsession for success. There is chaos in unison and unison in chaos- juxtapositions make ‘Clowns’ so violently addictive.

Bodies are interwoven into a tempest of aggression, with each frame in competition for power. We watch as dancers utilise each other for their own gain, dehumanising their social equivalents. The dancers are units presented as disposable puppets, hung from rugged strings of exploitation.

The dancers do not just choose to move- they are galvanised by the urge to stay relevant and fight for the limelight. They constantly gaze upwards, into the sky, perhaps hoping for a better tomorrow, or a peaceful resolution.

Movement is weighted in a painful struggle to keep afloat. Shechter choreographs upon every element of the human frame- no fingertip or inch of skin is left forgotten. Slumped and cleverly muddied, the dancers command themselves across their stage, their minds working quicker than their struggling bodies.

Demanding the utmost strength and physical control, it is clear to see the fierce calibre of Shechter’s dancers. To adhere to technical requirements is a skill, yet to let go of physical restraints, is a higher power. Expression through the facial medium is certainly there and it’s impressive, ‘Clowns’ is not just danced, it is performed.

To watch ‘Clowns’ is to watch a beautiful massacre- it’s fully immersive, yet addictively harrowing. Shechter’s ability to shroud horror in aesthetic is tirelessly engaging.

Universally emotive and ceaselessly impressive, ‘Clowns’ simply drips with success.