



DOUBLE MURDER

INTERVIEW WITH HOFESH SHECHTER

***Clowns* first appeared as part of *Sun* in 2014, then became its own piece in 2016. It then became part of *Show* in 2018, and now in 2020, it's back in *Double Murder*. Why do you feel the need to reuse, add, and rework elements from previous creations?**

Hofesh Schechter: If I feel I'm not done with a piece, I keep working on it. This segment, originally taken from *Sun*, deserved to be reworked. And last year, during the last performance of *Show*, which is the longest version of *Clowns* we've ever worked on, it was very hard for me to let go. It's a show that's had a lot of success and a huge impact on our audience. It still has real power, it resonates widely, and I figured I'd like to work on a sequel. The first part of this new show won't be quite *Clowns* or *Show*, but something in between, which will then be followed by a response, like a sort of reflection "after the fact." I'm lucky to have access to a playground to do what really matters to me, and to have a lot of freedom. I think the response to *Show*, which was performed by my young company Shechter II, arrives today with *Double Murder*, thanks to the more mature performance of the Hofesh Shechter Company. I also like to challenge and surprise myself. People who come to my shows know they'll be immersed in an atmosphere made of anger, sarcasm, humour, and darkness. But they also know that I'll always be looking for new ways to express myself, to imagine new languages and new energies with which to share pleasure.

The title, *Double Murder*, seems dangerous. There's a double meaning there. What should we expect?

Always expect the unexpected; that's what I hope my audience does. There's a very playful side to *Clowns*, it can be very funny or serious depending on the mood of the audience. It's a sort of celebration of a "choreographed murder," in all its beauty and horror. We use a lot of make-up, it's a great big show that explodes in the face of the audience. For the new piece, I wanted a completely different atmosphere, a sort of antidote, of cure. I wanted to start over, to take all the make-up off and get rid of the subterfuge to reach a pared-down situation, unveiling a great vulnerability. I wanted to explore the other side, turn inwards to look at how we face a hard and complex reality. There are several ways to understand the title. It's supposed to arouse the audience's interest, it's a sort of key to understand what they're getting into, a hint to awaken their imagination. The sentence "there's more than one way to die" inspired the title. There is, of course, the physical death of the body, but also that of the mind. There's an inner pain we reveal, and which can kill you slowly. Which hints at the fact that there's a quick and a slow way to die... *Double Murder* is also more simply a pun about the two sides of this project, which both include a form of "murder." I wouldn't try to explain it too much, but when I fall in love with a title, I just have this feeling that it's the right one. So yes, it is a troubling and threatening title, with a sense of danger to it. The first piece is dangerous, and the second one is as well, for different reasons...

For an ambiguous reason: our collective fascination with violence...

Yes, we like violence, we're "addicted" to it, it's part of the best movies we watch, it's become a distraction. The border between entertainment and violence is becoming ever thinner, but we're slowly becoming aware of this phenomenon. I started with the philosophical notion of *zeitgeist*, the "spirit of the times," with this rising awareness of our incapability to stop killing each other, to try to look at things from a different angle. The idea was to realise that, if people are horrible towards each other, we should rather slow down and slowly train ourselves to become benevolent and caring. *Clowns* depicts a world I'm trying to find a cure for, so that it can have contrasts again. In order to highlight those aspects in the new piece, I based the relationship between the dancers and the audience on human qualities such as fragility, softness, and compassion. It's probably a pathetic need for hope, but I really believe that the most precious currency we have today has something to do with hope... with time, too. It might be a bit naïve and utopian, but we need that naivety.

There's a humour to your shows that's never far from sarcasm. A certain melancholy that resembles the figure of the clown...

Sarcasm is a good way to transform anger and to digest information a little more easily, even if it can hit you in the face sometimes. Humour can be freeing. Heavy subjects create tension, and humour allows you to let off steam. But we're always on a blade's edge here, because humour can turn to sarcasm, it's a bearer of bad news... it's another step towards gravity. I like not knowing where we are exactly with the show, whether we're approaching things with derision, whether our subject is grave, sad, or funny. And I think it's a good attitude to have towards life, summed up well by the phrase "it would be funny if it weren't so sad." It's also an attitude that's characteristic of Jewish culture: when things really are dire, the only way to survive is to laugh about it. Humour carries a spark of life, it's very powerful. It allows you to put things in perspective, to have the feeling of rising above a situation instead of drowning in it. It's also a way for me to use the whole range of emotions which make up our humanity and to avoid falling into a melancholy that may seem mawkish and wouldn't be believable. I always wonder about the tone of a piece, if it becomes too grave, I add a joke so as not to be too serious, but if the show is too comedic, it isn't real either. Reality resides somewhere in that range of emotions.

How did you create and articulate the scenography for this double show, between the lights, the music, and the work with the dancers?

It's a rather complex combination of lights, choreography, image, and sound. I love the idea that everything converges towards one emotion over a single span of time. The music—which I composed as well—the images, the movements, everything is interwoven, inseparable. When we start working on the light, I already have a good idea of the atmosphere of the show. That's where lighting designers come in and offer ideas to make that atmosphere a reality. For this new creation, I wanted a different kind of light on stage to break all possible barriers between the dancers and the audience, to open and reveal everything, like a form of therapy. Music and choreography develop in the same movement, take shape in the same breath, and arrive together at maturity. For the music, I wanted there to be ties to the music of *Clowns*. Like it, it uses a lot of voices and singing, but the tone is softer. The voices are comforting, the singing calming. If *Clowns* has a powerful, percussive rhythm, the new score is much more peaceful and creates a contemplative atmosphere. I tried to compose a music that would produce a positive energy, a music that would bring light rather than anger. The dancers also play a primordial role in the creative process, because a large part of the show comes from their vulnerability. We improvised a lot and created situations of extreme fragility, breaking points to determine where and how we let go. We wanted to test our limits. Everything moves quickly in my shows, the audience doesn't have time to think, to rationalise, only to experience strong emotions and tensions. With that second piece, I wanted to give both the audience and the dancers some time. It's really about fixing things, about finding an antidote to this poison. It's a sort of counterpoint to *Clowns*, but also a moment of observation, of reflection, of contemplation, and no longer just a runaway train.

Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz the 2nd December 2019 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach