# Botis Seva’s Until We Sleep redefines hip-hop theatre with an immersive exploration of resistance



Choreographer Botis Seva’s latest work, Until We Sleep, is a compelling and atmospheric exploration of resistance, transformation, and survival through the lens of hip-hop theatre. Having risen from his early days as a hip-hop dancer in East London to acclaim on the European stage, Seva channels darkness not as a cloak for uncertainty, but as his creative cosmos—a space teeming with subconscious energy and nuanced expression.

Set against a backdrop of authoritarian power, the narrative follows a lone female figure, portrayed by Victoria Shulungu, a longtime collaborator with Seva, who leads a restless, wandering community. Her presence on stage is both commanding and contemplative, embodying a sage-like quest for faith and clarity amid struggle, hope, and reckoning. The journey unfolds in a surreal realm of shifting passages in time, highlighting the tension between oppressive forces and the enduring human spirit seeking salvation.

The work’s staging is minimalist yet evocative. Tom Visser’s lighting design layers the space in dim, hazy shadows, alternately flickering and shifting like stars or flames, while tall LED poles frame the stage, at times morphing into a cage or the teeth of a whale. This visual austerity complements Torben Sylvest’s intricate electronic soundscape, which melds percussion with guttural, celestial tones, creating a sonic environment rich in texture and resonance. Together, these elements form a volatile arena that accentuates the dancers’ rhythmic movements and the overarching theme of an omnipresent higher power shaping their reality.

Seva’s choreography is a synthesis of physicality and freeform movement, deeply rooted in hip-hop vernacular but also drawing subtle influences from his mentor Hofesh Shechter. The six ensemble members, identified as Far From The Norm, execute sequences with wiry energy—tight steps, sudden bursts, and agile, almost animalistic motions that convey resilience against adversity. Their feathered costumes evoke warriors shedding old identities, symbolising transformation and transcendence. The dancers appear buffeted by invisible forces, as if caught in relentless winds, expressing both vulnerability and defiance.

Until We Sleep is deliberately opaque, demanding immersion rather than straightforward comprehension from its audience. It shows a confident commitment to a distinctive artistic world, an introspective dive into the mind of an artist coming into his own. Earlier works by Seva, such as BLKDOG, similarly navigated dark and oppressive themes, combining restive, grounded movement with stark visual and auditory effects. However, Until We Sleep adds a layer of poetic invocation to the human spirit’s struggle to remain awake in a world that seems determined to induce sleep—a metaphor for submission or despair.

The production’s immersive style has met with mixed responses in wider programming contexts, where its murky atmosphere and elusive meanings contrast with more direct or traditional narratives. Nonetheless, Seva’s work is recognised for its skillful execution and raw emotional force, underpinned by an ensemble of dancers who bring a strong individual presence to the stage. The interplay of movement, sound, and light crafts a potent meditation on the complexities of faith, leadership, and resistance in a fluctuating world.

As the show tours and reaches diverse audiences, it continues to cement Botis Seva’s reputation for pushing the boundaries of hip-hop theatre, blending visceral intensity with subtle symbolism. Until We Sleep stands as a testament to the transformative power of dance to articulate the tensions and hopes that define contemporary existence.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/nov/21/botis-seva-blkdog-review-sadlers-wells), [[7]](https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[2]](https://www.sadlerswells.com/whats-on/botis-seva-far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep/), [[4]](https://www.sadlerswells.com/on-tour/current-productions/botis-seva-far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep/), [[7]](https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[7]](https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[4]](https://www.sadlerswells.com/on-tour/current-productions/botis-seva-far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep/), [[7]](https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[3]](https://dancemagazine.co.uk/2025/06/botis-sevas-until-we-sleep-comes-to-sadlers-wells-east/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/nov/21/botis-seva-blkdog-review-sadlers-wells), [[7]](https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/mar/10/far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep-botis-seva-corn-exchange-brighton-dome-review-ballet-national-de-marseille-lahorde-roommates-queen-elizabeth-hall-london), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/nov/21/botis-seva-blkdog-review-sadlers-wells)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london), [[3]](https://dancemagazine.co.uk/2025/06/botis-sevas-until-we-sleep-comes-to-sadlers-wells-east/), [[7]](https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/jun/25/botis-seva-until-we-sleep-review-sadlers-wells-east-london> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.sadlerswells.com/whats-on/botis-seva-far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep/> - Botis Seva's latest hip-hop theatre production, 'Until We Sleep', is a journey underlined with a resistance to change. Amidst the oppression of leadership, a lone woman yearns for faith as she leads a wandering community through shifting passages of time. With a celestial blend of percussion and guttural sounds, music bleeds effortlessly into an undulating style of movement performed by Far From The Norm. Feathered costumes give glimpses of warriors transcending above their former identities, whilst piercing light interrupts the stage as a pitiless testing ground, reminding us of a higher power that carves our reality.
3. <https://dancemagazine.co.uk/2025/06/botis-sevas-until-we-sleep-comes-to-sadlers-wells-east/> - After international acclaim for 'BLKDOG', Sadler’s Wells Associate Artist and Olivier Award-winning choreographer Botis Seva brings his latest work 'Until We Sleep' to Sadler’s Wells East from Tuesday 24 – Saturday 28 June 2025. The production, featuring Far From The Norm’s distinctive style of Hip Hop theatre, is a dark atmospheric journey through resistance, transformation and survival. Set against the backdrop of authoritarian power, a lone nomad searches for faith while guiding a restless community through shifting realms of time. With Seva’s signature blend of physicality and freeform movement, the dancers of Far From The Norm navigate a world shaped by struggle and resilience.
4. <https://www.sadlerswells.com/on-tour/current-productions/botis-seva-far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep/> - Botis Seva’s latest Hip Hop theatre production, 'Until We Sleep', is a journey underlined with a resistance to change. Amidst the oppression of leadership, a lone woman yearns for faith as she leads a wandering community through shifting passages of time. With a celestial blend of percussion and guttural sounds, music bleeds effortlessly into an undulating style of movement performed by Far From The Norm. Feathered costumes give glimpses of warriors transcending above their former identities, whilst piercing light interrupts the stage as a pitiless testing ground, reminding us of a higher power that carves our reality.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2024/mar/10/far-from-the-norm-until-we-sleep-botis-seva-corn-exchange-brighton-dome-review-ballet-national-de-marseille-lahorde-roommates-queen-elizabeth-hall-london> - Botis Seva’s new show is so murkily atmospheric that its meaning proves elusive. Elsewhere, a compelling if mixed programme of short works from French collective (La)Horde. The dancers seem to push back against their own progress, feet sharp, arms curving, bodies soft. Torben Sylvest has composed a wonderfully textured score, and Seva has imagined multiple striking moments. The opening work, Grime Ballet – Dance Because You Can’t Talk to Animals, by Cecilia Bengolea and François Chaignaud, had a fabulous, driving soundtrack and the interesting idea of putting all its dancers, male and female, in pointe shoes and then mixing street dance and classicism. Les Indomptés, in contrast, was a forgettable duet of emotion and support by Claude Brumachon and Benjamin Lamarche. Two works by (La)Horde themselves completed the lineup: Weather Is Sweet featured much dry humping in an energetic exploration of sexuality; Room With a View was an equally propulsive and more engaging view of protest, a rave and a riot, with lots of raised arms and defiance. In everything, the dancers were compelling, emerging as strong, watchable individuals, unifying the loose format and giving the night its force.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/nov/21/botis-seva-blkdog-review-sadlers-wells> - A lighting rig descends to form a low ceiling that casts more shadow than light. From a murky soundscape of electronic smears and thuds two voices intermittently emerge, one of a child, another of a therapist. Suddenly the dancers slump, knocked sideways by a whiplash beat. Where will this mix of alienation, oppression, memory and interrogation lead? In some senses, to many different places. The dancers scurry into lemming lines that circle the stage, cluster into unstable groups riven by the musical rhythm, or drill themselves into synchronised squadrons. The movement style, often close to the ground, is restless and inventive: beetling runs, cossack squats. Often a solo will stand briefly out from the group, one spotlit figure flailing upon the floor, or shuddering in perfect time to the rattles and scratches of the score. Restless and inventive … Botis Seva’s Blkdog. Photograph: Camilla Greenwell. There’s a cardiac resuscitation performed urgently yet coldly upon a supine body, a soulless orgy of simulated doggy sex offered for our pleasure (“give the people what they want”). Later, tricycling figures, playtime costumes and finger-pointing blame-games shift the piece towards the territory of childhood – though that certainly doesn’t banish brutality, both psychological and (with a baseball bat) very physical. Yet if the scenes are different, their means are similar: groups either regimented or ragged, solos signalled by sudden spotlights and sonic switches, actions synched to rhythms, the stage smogged and strafed by lights. Though executed with consummate skill (plaudits to lighting designer Tom Visser and composer Torben Lars Sylvest as well as all seven dancers), the cumulative effect over 80 minutes is a certain relentlessness: taut, technically impressive and hard-hitting – again, and again. Perhaps that’s in keeping with the subject: it is, and will be, a depressingly cruel world. Where does this lead though? Seva gestures towards God (there are tentative hymns at the end); I yearned for a more human face.
7. <https://untilwesleep.co.uk/about> - After the success of BLKDOG, Botis Seva and Far From The Norm cement their distinctive style of hip hop theatre with Until We Sleep. Until We Sleep, the latest hip-hop dance work from acclaimed London-based choreographer Botis Seva, is a dark, atmospheric journey through resistance, transformation, and survival. Set against the backdrop of authoritarian power, a lone nomad searches for faith while guiding a restless community through shifting realms of time. With Seva’s signature blend of Hip Hop physicality and freeform movement, the dancers of Far From The Norm navigate a world shaped by struggle and resilience. Driven by a haunting soundscape of percussion and guttural textures, the choreography pulses with urgency. Feathered costumes evoke warriors shedding past identities, while stark lighting carves the stage into a volatile arena—one where a higher force looms, unrelenting and divine. Until We Sleep explores the tension between hope and responsibility, asking what we cling to in order to keep going. Visceral and poetic, it’s a powerful invocation of the human spirit’s fight to stay awake in a world that wants it to sleep.