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Gypsy Mixture

Richard Alston



Resource Pack

Compiled by Sarah Dekker © The Place 2010

Richard Alston and The Company

About Richard Alston

My first memory of dance is going to see a Polish folk company when I was a child and the fact that dance is a social activity is absolutely basic to my work. **It's not about making shapes or designs, unless it's also about human beings dancing together.**

(Richard Alston, 2007)



Richard Alston was born in Sussex, England in 1948 and was educated at Eton College. He left school at 17 to study art at Croydon College of Art, the year he discovered his interest in dance when he saw Margot Fonteyn perform Frederick **Ashton's work at the Royal Opera House**. He began taking ballet classes at the Rambert School and seeing dance performances, mainly ballet, as there was very little contemporary in Britain at that time - the Martha Graham Company first visited the UK in 1954.

Very early on I saw *La Fille Mal Gardée* by Frederick Ashton and I thought I'd really like to make something like that. Especially all the group dances with everyone dancing together. It was like folk dancing. The only dancing I had done up until then was social dancing, like barn dancing.

(Richard Alston, 2007)

In 1967 Alston became one of the first students at the new London School of Contemporary Dance (LCDS), which had opened in 1966, offering a training in Graham technique. The ethos of the school was inspired by aspects of the Judson Church Dance Theatre, an experimental movement in New York in the 1960s. Artists involved in the Judson Church group included visual artists, musicians and choreographers such as Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton and Lucinda Childs. Reflecting this collaborative aspect, LCDS encouraged cross-art form experimentation.

In 1972, Alston formed Strider, **Britain's** first independent dance collective, which was experimental and democratic, with opportunities for the dancers to choreograph as well as dance, exploring pedestrian movement alongside technique.

Performance venues included art galleries as well as theatres. **Alston's work was** seen as radical in comparison to Ballet Rambert (now Rambert Dance Company) and London Contemporary Dance Company (later London Contemporary Dance Theatre, LCDT), as both these companies' **contemporary repertoire** included works created in the style of Martha Graham.

In America, Merce Cunningham was developing a new approach to contemporary dance, which challenged the choreographic style of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, in that Cunningham believed in dance as an art form in its own right, rather than as a medium for a narrative.

In the early 1970s Alston was commissioned by Robert Cohan, then Artistic Director of LCDT, to make a series of works for their repertoire. In 1973, Strider was in residency at Dartington College of Arts in Devon, where he met Mary Fulkerson, an American dance artist, who was working with new forms of movement, now known as Release Technique and Contact Improvisation. The principle of Release Technique is to allow the anatomy and alignment of the body to release movement, rather than using muscular strength. **Associated with T'ai Chi, Release emphasises a free flow of movement, which is still evident in Alston's choreography today.**

Alston went to New York in 1975 to study at the Merce Cunningham Dance Studio and Cunningham became a strong influence on his choreography. On his return to Britain two years later, he started choreographing for his own ensemble, Richard Alston and Dancers, which included Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink, as well as teaching. He created a new work for LCDT and in 1980 he was invited to choreograph a piece for Rambert, *Bell High*.

By the early 1980s, **Alston's work was increasingly using classical ballet vocabulary** combined with Cunningham technique. He was commissioned by the Royal Danish Ballet and the Royal Ballet in the **early 1980s and became Ballet Rambert's** Associate Choreographer. He collaborated again with Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink, forming the dance company Second Stride, but he left in 1983, as he no longer felt his abstract and highly technical style was compatible **with the company's more** theatre-based work.

In 1986 Alston was appointed Artistic Director of Ballet Rambert and a year later, he changed the name of the company to Rambert Dance Company, as he felt this more **accurately represented the company's work.** He continued in this role until 1992, creating twenty-five works for Rambert.

The next two years were spent on choreography for a number of companies, including evenings of his own work for LCDT and others, leading Alston to decide to start his own company. In 1994 he became Artistic Director of The Place and, with the closure of LCDT, Richard Alston Dance Company was formed in November of that year.

Richard Alston talks about his Company

March 2008

Richard Alston Dance Company was founded in 1994, the same year Richard became Artistic Director of The Place.

I worked for a long time before I found myself forming my own company and it still **feels very recent, even though it's fourteen years ago**. Up until then I was always working in a situation where there were other choreographers - when I was at Rambert as Artistic **Director I would look after other people's work**.

I found when I started this company it was the most wonderful moment of concentration, where I could really take time on my own work. As soon as I began to do that, it became easier to make it. There are some things about choreographing that have become much harder - **because I'm almost sixty** and physically things hurt much more!

The link between movement and music is the main drive of the Company
Over the years that this company has been in existence, I've been working particularly with the relationship between music and movement. When I first started choreographing I was almost discovering a vocabulary, which I think is to do with the flow of energy through the body. Then I began to explore space and I think of my work as almost like drawing in space.

When I joined Rambert in 1980 I began to deal with music. As it was a large funded company I could also deal with design and I worked with a number of painters and sculptors, as well as composers. But when this company came into being it was part of our brief to be economical, so it was a choice, but a welcome choice, that I decided just to concentrate on music, such as live music I could afford, and on the link between movement and music. **That's really been the main drive of the Company**.



Amie Brown and Jonathan Goddard in rehearsal (Photo: Yolande Yorke-Edgell)

The dance that I make is very sculptural

It's quite hard to talk about your own work because you're very close to it. But I now sometimes look at work that I've made recently and think I know more about what it is that I'm doing. I think I understand how many different elements that I'm trying to juggle. I'm juggling complexity, to the point where it almost becomes invisible, **flashing moments of clarity into that so the audience doesn't get** exhausted, dealing with three dimensional movement.

I'm really interested in very sharp changes of direction. I'm very drawn to duets, because when you've got two people, all they have to do is lean on each other and **you've already got something very sculptural.** The dance that I make is very sculptural.

I like the notion that movement can leave energy behind it, like waving a sparkler around in the garden, that energy can make a line. So I often talk to the dancers about movement which I think of as a thrust of a sword or a swipe into the space. And to me that makes space.

I can be very excited by a space

The thing that I love about dance is that you make something very complicated and **it's gone.** Then you make something else and **it's gone.** You're making all these changes, all these spaces, which I think of as architectural. If I think of another art form that inspires me other than music, I go and look at buildings, I look at a lot of contemporary architecture. I can be very excited by a space.

I love the idea you can make really quite complicated dance without slamming the body into the floor. **I'm very resistant to the idea of** dancer as bendy toy. I love detail, small movement which makes texture.

I never prepare

I think the realisation of all these things somehow makes me think more clearly **when I'm in the studio now.** I used to sort of suck it and see, my motto was '**see what happens**'. You can see elements of that in the sextet in *Gypsy Mixture* - **that's a** particular example of when I build texture by people doing all sorts of wild things. **It's about a situation that is fierce and wild, but it's also this amazing energy, the life of dance that's not predictable.**

I never prepare. I have tried it - **I've been doing this for forty years! When I've tried** to prepare dance it dies before my very eyes. **So I don't prepare steps before I go in.** I prepare the music until I know it **absolutely backwards, it's in my bloodstream.** Then I rely on something. **That's why to me** *Nigredo* was such a surprise; I had no idea what I was going to do. **And when that happens, that's what you live for, when** that spark suddenly comes out of somewhere.

I try to have a mixture of people in the Company

For me an aspect of making dance is the link between choreographing and teaching. **It's very exciting to take a young dancer and watch them grow. It's wonderful when** dancers stay with the company. Martin Lawrance danced with the company for 14 years, right up until this season.

Jonathan Goddard has danced with the Company for five years and to watch him **grow, to see how he's arrived where he is now, is something that I particularly love** about working in dance. **So when I'm making a Company, an ensemble, I try to have a mixture of people who've been dancing for some time and younger people who can learn from that and grow and blossom.** That works very well for me.

I think of class as separate from my choreography

I love teaching, but there's a part of me that dreads being an expert teacher and a rather mediocre choreographer! I teach what I know – I know that my classes are now quite simple – **I think it's *how* you do something, it's not about doing something very fast – I'm quite happy to do that in choreography. I don't teach movement in class that goes into the choreography – I think of class as something quite separate. It's about looking after a group of people, making fantastic discoveries – I find that very stimulating and later on in the day I'll make all sorts of complicated movement and it'll all come flowing out. But I don't make things in class which I then put into the choreography. I think of them as quite separate.**

I'm very drawn to movement that flows

I think the work I make is technically demanding because I am enthralled by humans' extraordinary ability to challenge themselves. I find that amazing to watch in athletes. **There's nothing to win in dance, it's not a competition, except that you're in competition with your own ability and potential. I don't care how many pirouettes they do, it's about how they're pushing themselves, how they work from inside.** I'm very drawn to movement that flows. There is a flow in the classical ballet language, especially early classical ballet; **it's become quite taut and tense now. There's something about the language of classical dance that I'm prepared to explore within reason, but I hardly ever work with classically trained dancers.**

I'm a big person, therefore the movement that I do myself is liable to be weighty and **I've learned to embrace that.** I think that also comes from my early training in Martha Graham technique, very earthy, weighty, and deep into the floor. Then I went to America to study with Merce Cunningham, then I directed the Rambert company which was basically classically trained. When I came back here to The Place, I found myself getting all weighty again and I was very happy to explore that. In particular for women, **it's the opposite of** pointe work and lift, which classical ballet is all about.

I love the vastness of movement in space

Line is something I find very extraordinary, the line that the human body can make. **When the line is connected we are all thrilled by it because it's cosmic** in its reach, **it's not about a little shape in the body it's about a line through the body that goes through the entire universe, the energy seems to go forever.** I love the vastness of movement in space, much much larger than this rather puny little thing called the human body. That links with classical dance.

I love detail

Apart from Merce Cunningham whom I studied with for two years and whose work **I've seen probably more than any other artist, when I came back to England from America I looked hard at Ashton's work, because I needed another choreographer to** relate to and his work was around a lot. **I didn't really mind about the** stories he was telling, but the way he used the back and the torso and the way he used small steps and detail spoke to me in a very direct way. **Merce's work is about constant, full force movement, every movement is as energetic as the next, there are no minor transitional movements, that's not part of his philosophy.** I embrace minor transitional movements, I love detail, I find a nineteenth century choreographer like Bournonville absolutely fascinating, because of the texture and rhythm, all these things that seem to me a really rich part of dance. **I'm a very impure choreographer,** I chuck into my work anything that I want. **So if people think it looks classical, that's fine, I don't mind.** But there are all sorts of things in there. **It's a rag bag really.**

One of the weird things about being a choreographer is that your artists get younger and younger than you!

Merce Cunningham is now in his 80s and he choreographs with the help of a computer. **I can't imagine I will be making work at that age, I find it quite hard now.** As you get older, physically your body gets more sore and things get more difficult. **Frankly, you wouldn't be dancing unless you really needed to.** I never find it a struggle when I am actually in the studio with the dancers. I think one of the weird things about being a choreographer is that your artists get younger and younger than you. **I started off with my friends, with Siobhan Davies who's the same age as me - we got into the studio, I asked her to do something and then told her I didn't like it, whatever!** It was very equal. Now I find myself talking to the dancers about things that I realise happened before they were born. They are quite definitely **young enough to be my children, so that's a different kind of relationship.** I rely on them more and more. **I don't mind that at all.** It means that certain dancers become very important to me.

I'm interested in how younger people are involved with the work, how I can relate to them and what they can do with their prime level of physical skill while I try to scratch around trying to show them what I might like. So in a sense the imagery **behind the movement becomes more important because that's something I can give. That's what I've learned about teaching.** You can talk to someone about *how* they should stand until you're blue in the face, but if you can give them an image behind the movement it leads the movement on to another level. **I've learned to appreciate** that as a really important part of teaching, to talk about what this movement might feel like or why you would move this way, that and understanding more about what I specifically want and about my musical phrasing - all have led to a point where sometimes I just let them get on with it for minutes at a time in the studio. **That's** why I can watch a piece of choreography and see how they turn it into something lively. **I'm less specific than I used to be, happily so.** I watch a piece come alive by something that they bring to it.

I think of myself as a writer

I don't ask them to improvise. I'm very possessive about the marks I make in space. I think of myself as a writer, if I wasn't a choreographer I'd be a writer, but I'm fascinated by this weird thing called movement and it keeps me enthralled so I'm still making dances. It's a very different way of thinking now and often I'm quite happy when things go wrong, because sometimes that's when a dance is lively.

Dancers have a very punishing schedule, but when they're exhausted they sometimes give the most amazing performance. They don't feel it, when I go backstage and tell them that's the best they've done it I'm greeted with looks of astonishment. I feel able to let go of things more than I used to. I certainly would have described myself earlier in life as a control freak - I was pushing to get something right, not just let something go; it had to be every bit as good as it could be. Now I look at dance and I want it to be every bit as *clear* as it could be. If there's some way I can make something clearer to share with an audience I will dig away at that. But when the dancers are dancing now, I'm sometimes quite happy to sit there. I hope they don't feel I'm sleeping on the job, but I'm actually just really happy watching what they do.



Above: First group dance (Still from the DVD)

Company Dancers appearing in the DVD (filmed 2007)



ANNELI BINDER started dancing in Germany where she was born. She trained at the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and at London Contemporary Dance School. Anneli worked with Mark Baldwin, who was then a guest choreographer at Rambert, for his piece *TIME*. After she graduated in 2004 she danced for Tanztheater Freiburg-**Heidelberg, in artistic director Irina Pauls' CARMINA BURANA**. Anneli joined Richard Alston Dance Company in August 2005. In 2006 Anneli worked for the Yorke Dance Project.



AMIE BROWN was born in Tonbridge, Kent, and began her dance training in Botswana, Southern Africa. Amie trained at London Contemporary Dance School. Her undergraduate project was with Hofesh Shechter. For her MA she wrote an A-level study guide for **Richard Alston's RED RUN** and served a one year postgraduate apprenticeship with the Richard Alston Dance Company. Amie became a full-time dancer with RADC in 2006.



DARREN ELLIS trained at Rambert Dance School (1987-90), at the Laban Centre, and Transitions Dance Company (1990-91). He has danced with David Massingham Dance, Janet Smith and Dancers, PAGE Dance Theatre (Freiburg, Germany), Mark Bruce Dance Company, Small Bones Dance Company, Jeremy James Dance Company, Matthew Bourne (*SWAN LAKE* original cast, *CINDERELLA*, *NUTCRACKER!* and *PLAY WITHOUT WORDS*), Random Dance Company and Snag Project (Jo Fong and Sarah Warsop). Darren has been teaching at Rambert Dance School since 2003 and joined Richard Alston Dance Company as rehearsal director in August 2005. In 2007 Darren danced in **Martin Lawrance's BRINK** and **Richard Alston's Gypsy Mixture**. Darren began choreographing in 2007.



JONATHAN GODDARD grew up in Hastings and trained at the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance. In 1999 he joined Scottish Dance Theatre under the artistic direction of Janet Smith. Jonathan joined Richard Alston Dance Company in **2002. Since then he has danced in a revival of Robert Cohan's 1969 duet ECLIPSE for Cohan's 80th birthday gala, a revival** of the Siobhan Davies Dance Company solo, THE SWAN, for the BBC celebration in memory of John Drummond, and with English National Ballet in their 2005 production of ROMEO AND JULIET. In 2007, Jonathan was the first contemporary dancer to be nominated for the South Bank Show/Times newspaper Breakthrough Award.



HANNAH KIDD was born in Oxfordshire, England, and began her training at Elmhurst School for Dance in association with Birmingham Royal Ballet. From Elmhurst she went on to continue her training at London Contemporary Dance School where she completed a BA (Hons) degree. While at LCDS, she worked with Hofesh Shechter and Jeannie Steele (formerly of Merce Cunningham Dance Company). In her final year at LCDS, she performed in the third year touring company, LC3, which included in its repertoire works by Richard Alston, Tom Dale and Jan De Schynkel. She joined Richard Alston Dance Company as an apprentice dancer in 2007.



JORGE BREA SALGUEIRO was born in Vigo, Spain, and graduated from the Royal School of Physical Drama in Madrid. From 1995-2005 he trained at the Karen Taft School of Dance, in Lyrical Jazz, Limon and Graham techniques. He completed his training at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) on the One Year Certificate course. **In 2007, he danced in Richard Alston's THE SIGNAL OF A SHAKE** during the LCDS graduation performances. Jorge joined RADC as an apprentice dancer in 2007.



SILVESTRE SANCHEZ STRATTNER was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and was brought up in Germany. At 19 he started his full-time dance training at the College for Performing Arts in Frankfurt. He came to London in 2001 to study at London Studio Centre for one year before joining EDge, the postgraduate performing group of London Contemporary Dance School. With EDge he danced in works by Trisha Brown, Vanessa Haska, Kerry Nicholls and Ben Wright. He joined Richard Alston Dance Company in autumn 2004 and danced with English National Ballet in the 2005 production of ROMEO AND JULIET.



ROSE SUDWORTH was born in Germany and trained at London Contemporary Dance School. In 1994 she became **a member of 4D (LCDS's postgraduate performance group)**, where she worked with Richard Alston, Laurie Booth, Dan Wagoner and Henri Oguike. After graduating she returned to Germany where she worked as a freelance dancer, choreographer and teacher. In 2000, Rose formed Contract, a youth dance company and was a founder contemporary dance teacher at the Freiburger Akademie Fur Tanz in 2002. She returned to London in 2003 and joined H2O (sister company to Henri Oguike Dance Company) as a rehearsal director/dancer in December 2003. Rose has taught at the Laban Summer School, and has been a guest teacher for the last three years at London Contemporary Dance School and The Place. She was a dancer with Henri Oguike Dance Company 2005 - 2006 before joining Richard Alston Dance Company in July 2006.



PIERRE TAPPON was born in Angoulême, France. He began his dance training at the Patricia Vaysse School of Dance, moving in 2002 to Bordeaux to join the Junior Ballet **D'Aquitaine, under the direction of Daniel Agesilas. In 2005 - 2006** Pierre completed his training at the London Contemporary Dance School; during this time he worked with Jan de Schynkel and with Richard Alston in recreations of STRONG LANGUAGE and GYPSY MIXTURE. He has also choreographed a Franco - Italian duet UNDER THE SIGN for the LCDS graduation performances. Pierre served a one year apprenticeship with the RADC, before joining as a full-time dancer in summer 2007.



YOLANDE YORKE-EDGELL trained at Arts Educational School, Central School of Ballet and London Studio Centre. After graduating she joined Extemporary Dance Theatre. She went on to dance with Extreme Measures before joining Rambert Dance Company. In 1994 she moved to Los Angeles to join the Lewitzky Dance Company where she danced many leading roles and was a master teacher. In 1998 she formed her own dance company in Los Angeles, Yorke Dance Project. Yolande has also been a guest artist for Pacific Dance Ensemble, the Posthouse Dance Group and Los Angeles **Philharmonic Orchestra's Stravinsky evening at the Disney Hall**. She has also worked for the Los Angeles Opera and in 2001 co-directed the play Time Out for the New York Fringe Festival. On returning to England she danced in Adam **Cooper's LES LIASIONS DANGEREUSES** and also Graham **Vick's A MIDSUMMER'S MARRIAGE with the Royal Opera**. Yolande joined Richard Alston Dance Company in the summer of 2006.

Gypsy Mixture

Introduction to *Gypsy Mixture*

There's a lot of joy in *Gypsy Mixture*, but there's a darker side too. It's about being on the periphery of society, rejected by society, becoming very close as a community because you are persecuted, or marginalised, or forced to move on.
(Richard Alston, December 2007)

Gypsy Mixture is not a narrative piece, yet it has a strong sense of place and character, although these are not clearly defined by set and only suggested by costume. There is no story as such, but the choreography and music together conjure up vivid images of a group of people with their own identity, which alters as they travel from place to place.

I often have an idea about a piece which I don't necessarily need the audience to know. It's what I might call a 'line through' and in *Gypsy Mixture* it's a journey. There's a travelling image - the idea that gypsies pick up culture when they arrive somewhere and they also bring their own culture with them. You can see that clearly with Kathak dance from India, which travelled into Spain, so there are direct links between Kathak and Flamenco. For me it's hugely important that human beings consider music and dance such an important part of their culture that they will carry it through continents.
(Richard Alston, December 2007)

Martin Lawrance, who is now Rehearsal Director for the Company, but was originally one of the dancers who helped Richard Alston to create *Gypsy Mixture*, explains its progression.

The whole piece is a journey. It starts off in an older kind of world and you get all these couples having their different threads through the piece, then it ends up at the Bucovina club with everyone having a good time. Audiences normally go wild at the end of it, because you progress through this little story almost and then boom!
(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)



Above: First group dance (Still from the DVD)

Structure

The structure of the piece is an introduction, a solo, a duet and a big group dance, end of act one, then we start again, solo, duet, group dance, going up to the very happy resolution at the end. **The structure's repeated.**

(Richard Alston, December 2007)

The actual structure is not quite as simple as that! Sections lead into other sections and solos and duets are intermingled. Some are short and seemingly transitional, **such as the duet following the 'Dog Solo', while others are more substantial, such as the Samba Duet and the full Company section in the middle of the piece, known as 'Tribes'.** The running order is outlined below:

Solo

Group section (8 dancers)

Duet

Group

Solo ('Dog'), leading to short duet.

Duet ('Samba')

Duet ('Hat')

Solo leading to duet.

Group section (10 dancers: full company, 'Tribes')

Duet ('Clarinet') – starts with male solo, female solo, duet, female solo, male solo, duet.

Duet ('Café')

Solo ('Drumming')

Group section (6 dancers, Richard Alston refers to it as the 'sextet')

Duet

Finale: solo – group (full company) with solo male dancer

The Dancers

Gypsy Mixture uses all ten dancers from the Company. Several of the dancers from the original production in 2004 have changed and only Jonathan Goddard and Silvestre Sanchez Strattner remain from that cast. Martin Lawrance, another original cast member, recently retired from performing and is now rehearsal director, as well as choreographing for the Company. He originally created the part that is danced by Silvestre on the DVD.

As a dancer you always get stuck in with Richard. Because I've been with Richard a long time, he knows the way I move. It's really interesting recreating the piece now and teaching the dancers, because there's only Jon and Silvestre from the original ten. And me, but obviously I'm on the outside now. So it was interesting going back to what Richard really wanted, especially for parts I hadn't done before because I wasn't in the studio when they were being created. We referred to the original studio footage of rehearsals, so I've seen how it changed for the last revival and how it's changed with this cast. The second time it was restaged there were only two new dancers, so it wasn't a big shift around.

(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)

There are three main couples in the piece, who are defined by the Company as follows:

Hat Duet:	Darren Ellis (rust coloured shirt over T-shirt and hat) Yolande Yorke-Edgell (red, spotty dress)
Clarinet Duet:	Silvestre Sanchez Strattner (dark hair, blue top) Rose Sudworth (green dress)
Samba Duet:	Jonathan Goddard (beard, dark red T-shirt and blue, patched trousers) Anneli Binder (short blonde hair, halterneck dress with white and orange patterns)
Drumming section solo:	Pierre Tappon (dark hair, pale blue top and dark blue trousers)
Other dancers:	Amie Brown (dark hair in a ponytail, dark pink floral dress with blue check underskirt) Hannah Kidd (very short blonde hair, lilac dress) Jorge Brea Salgueiro (dark hair, red top)

Richard Alston explains his idea: 'The whole village has particular couples and then they travel across the world. **There's the couple who remember the village all the time, that's Darren and Yolande.** Rose and Silvestre accumulate different cultures as they travel. Silvestre in particular has a lot of movement that comes from Asian dance. Anneli **and Jon are the strong couple, they're the youngest, most positive couple.'**

The Dance

Gypsy Mixture begins with the sound of voices speaking in Romanian in the blackout. The atmosphere is of a village square, with snatches of different conversations, from different generations. A bicycle bell rings and the lights come up on a dimly lit stage, as a casually dressed man in a hat walks on to stage, with his head down, from downstage left. (This is Darren in the DVD.)

Richard calls Darren the 'wheeler-dealer', the Del-boy of Gypsy Mixture. It's almost like there's some dodgy deal going on. It's Darren's physicality that sets the scene, rather than a narrative.

(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)

The music begins, establishing a lively off-beat rhythm with brass band. Darren immediately begins a short ten-bar solo, with long sideways travelling movements and arms extended, using the space downstage, briefly using the floor. He plays with his hat, throwing it up in the air and catching it as he dances. **Darren's character is** the only one with a strong sense of characterisation and even that is not apparent throughout. Characterisation and place are hinted at, rather than prescribed.

The whole piece starts with the clever guy in the village, 'Mr Fix-it', who is always skulking around hiding behind his hat. He's sharp, he's clever and he's on the make.

(Richard Alston, December 2007)



Above: First group dance (Still from the DVD)

The lights brighten suddenly and the backcloth turns blue as a crowd of seven dancers explodes on to stage from upstage right. They dance in unison, using all the

space. Having exited stage right after his solo, Darren joins the group discreetly after the first couple of phrases, as they dance towards stage right again, making a group of eight dancers.

The dancers stay in a two line formation for the most part. Briefly they dance in couples, still in unison, similar to a social dance, as they pass each other and dance around their partner. They then revert to group unison phrases. Folk style travelling steps, extended feet and legs and arms tilted and stretched, combine with turns, hops and occasional hip jiggling. The movement is earthy and weighted, yet the mood is uplifting, giving an impression of a community united. Richard Alston sums it up: **'the picture is of a celebratory dance in a village, like a wedding dance.'**

The dancers form a line at the back, then dance in couples. They travel forward in unison in a diagonal line. The final part of this celebratory dance (after the brief duet by the Clarinet couple, when the dancers all travel forward in unison) is a clear **example of Richard's detailed knowledge of the music and the way this is reflected** in his choreography. The dancers repeat a travelling step, first going on a diagonal to down stage left, then the same phrase across the stage to stage right. The music then repeats a final phrase, building in momentum, as instruments are added and the key modulates upwards. The dance for these three repeated phrases, while at first appearing to be the same phrase three times, contains subtle developments. A star shape (arms extended in a high V, legs in a V, but weight on the heels with feet flexed to sides) is repeated three times, the first time facing front, the second time the dancers have turned to face the back and the final time it becomes a jump, still in the star shape. In between similar energetic folk type movements are subtly varied with turns and folk-style arabesque leans.

Clarinet Duet

The first duet breaks away from this line - this pair are known by the company as the Clarinet Duet, simply because when they dance there is an eastern sounding clarinet solo in the music.

The other three couples remain in position at the back of the stage, then they all dance forward to join the duet. In two lines, men in front and women behind, they dance in unison before they exit as the music changes, leaving Darren alone, this time without his hat. The lights dim again.

Dog Solo

I love the fact that on this record they've put in all sorts of village sounds. I could have edited them or chosen not to use them, but the children and the bike and the dog and the accordion in the café are all part of the atmosphere. Darren has this **solo where he's jumping around as if he's trying to move his heels to avoid being nipped by the dog. That's all part of his character.**

(Richard Alston, December 2007)

There is the sound of a dog barking on the soundtrack and what sounds like a man remonstrating with it, along with a violin solo. **Darren's solo uses floor work for the first time, but again the expansive movements already seen.**

Yolande (wearing a dark red spotty dress) enters from down stage right and she and Darren perform a short duet. The music establishes a drum beat – and the dog continues to yap.

I think of that couple as a thread through the piece - they have three duets and this is the first. During the piece, there are different couples with different feelings.

(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)

Samba Duet

As the music develops, the Samba couple enter from up stage right (Jonathan and Anneli). Darren and Yolande exit simultaneously down stage right. The lights brighten as the Samba couple burst on to the stage, with an orange backcloth and pink stage. **Martin Lawrance describes them as 'a young couple, as though they are off to a club'.**

*The third dance was mixed by a DJ in Brazil so we call it the Samba. But actually the dance is really influenced by the Tarantella, which of course is completely culturally inappropriate – **except that we're mixing all the cultures anyway.** When Jon and Anneli dance together a lot of it is based on the Tarantella, on the play between two dancers and on that wonderful rhythmic stamping. Then there are the strange little hip wiggles – **there's wonderful warmth to the music and there's this strange Eastern voice in the middle, a woman's voice which ripples through this chant.***

Those two people, they figure throughout the dance as a very strong couple.

(Richard Alston, December 2007)

The phrasing of the duet works with the music, the dancers pausing at the end of a phrase, before leaping off again. The couple work together as a partnership, moving apart and coming together, as they dance a wide circular pathway around the stage. As in the previous two duets, there is a definite relationship between the dancers who dance in unison, or as a couple.

Jonathan Goddard describes the process: 'The Samba dance was originally made on me and another dancer called Maria. We had a very flirty sort of relationship, so that comes across. **And then the music, I'd feel very strange not to put that response into the dance, so that's when those hip movements came in.** You could just do exactly what **Richard's asked for, but why use that music if you're not going to respond to it? Richard's not Merce Cunningham and he loves music, so you may as well use it.**

'The side arm movement I think Richard was thinking about the Graham technique arm movements, but for me it was just "party time", so I did it like that. And in my first solo (stirring movement), he showed me something and I thought "Are you sure?! Well I'll do it like this!"

*I made it more of a breakdance, locking style movement. **But Richard doesn't have that reference, he's grasping at ideas, he wants something that looks funky or***

trendy. **It's his choreography because it was his idea to have that kind of step in that place, but he doesn't really know what that step is, he wants it to look natural.'**

Samba style movements are incorporated into contemporary fluidity and punctuated by folk steps and the characteristic sexy hip movements, that have already been seen and that originated from Jonathan. The music and the dance, together with the bright lighting state combine to create an infectious feeling of light hearted gaiety.

When I teach Richard's work to other dancers I always like to go back to the original source. Where did that movement come from? It came from that particular dancer. What was it about that dancer that I need to get from another dancer, who is often a very different mover? Luckily I've never had to teach anyone Jonathan's parts yet. If I did, I'd probably have to get him to come and teach it, because he's so individual - in a great way. All of those solos were made on him, all the little jiggy moves of the hip. Richard's got ten dancers and everyone is very different.

(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)

We hear the noise of an engine passing, perhaps a motorbike or car, as the Samba couple exit.



Above: Jonathan Goddard and Anneli Binder in the Samba duet (Still from the DVD)

Hat Duet

Yolande and Darren return for their second duet. This has a flirtatious, cheeky feel, where at first she steals his hat and he tries to get it back. Some of their movement echoes that of the Samba duet, but it is sharper and less fluid, partly due to the slower tempo of the music. Each time the Hat couple dance, the lighting is dim, the background black, which makes the atmosphere more intimate and gives the dancers almost a sepia tone with the earthy, terracotta colours in their costumes. The space they use is mostly downstage. Again, their duet introduces a new section.

Solo

I'm a very impure choreographer. I chuck into my work anything that I want. So if **people think it looks classical, that's fine, I don't mind.** But there are all sorts of things in there. **It's a rag bag really.**

(Richard Alston, December 2007)

The lighting brightens a little to a dark red background and blue stage and there follows a solo by a male dancer (Silvestre, from the Clarinet duet) which begins a very rhythmic section. Created by Martin Lawrance, he describes it: **'Silvestre's solo is all on a 12 count phrase and contains very strong rhythms which build.'**



Above: Silvestre **Sanchez Strattner's** solo (*Still from the DVD*)

The solo combines strong geometric shapes and arabesques with contemporary style changes of direction, initiated by the head. Into this mix come movements apparently inspired by other ethnic dance styles, such as Bharata Natyam. Martin recalls: **'Shobana Jeyasingh (the South Asian dance choreographer) asked Richard**

who had worked with the Company on the Kathak steps. Richard said, **"Nobody – it was just me and Martin in the studio!" I'm from Leicester and a lot of my friends do Bharat Natyam.** And when I was at the school here (London Contemporary Dance School) we did a term of South Asian dance. **I've seen a lot and it felt quite natural** to incorporate an element of these styles **into the choreography.'** But as Alston says, it includes elements of many dance styles, not just South Asian dance. The solo also features strong extended arms, star shapes, jumps and leg kicks.

The pounding rhythms in the music eventually build to a full company section, but first Rose joins Silvestre in another **duet, before the two 'rival tribes' walk on to stage** from opposite directions.



Above: Rose Sudworth and Silvestre Sanchez Strattner in the Clarinet Duet (Still from DVD)

Full company section: *Tribes*

The full company of ten dancers is seen on stage for the first time. Men and women dance in same sex groups on opposite sides of the stage. The dance is a kind of question and answer section, with driving, sinister vocals on the soundtrack – Richard likens it to the rival gangs, the Sharks and the Jets from the musical *West Side Story*. **Structurally it's the first time that everybody is on stage** together and it marks the middle of the piece. All ten dancers are not on stage together again until the end.

There's a dance which we call Tribes – it starts off with a solo for Silvestre with very different cultural elements in it. But then they **gather together and there's this very strange conversation between the two older guys, some strange old ballad, where they do a question and answer. It's like some old village ritual and there's a conversation between the men and the women.**

(Richard Alston, December 2007)

Tribes begins with the women stage left and the men stage right. The women start **the movement 'conversation' and the men respond.** The two groups meet and partner each other in unison, then the men spin past so that each group is now on the opposite side. They meet once more and move as a full company to one side, then the other. The two groups clearly relate to one another using their focus.



Above: Tribes section (still from the DVD)

The music is full of menace and the movement is heavy and weighted; the sound of unison footwork from folk style steps echoes the pounding in the soundtrack. In the unison partnering sections the dancers hold a shape before moving to the next, which gives the impression of them pushing and pulling each other. At times the duet sections evoke a relationship between couples that could be tender or brutal. Gradually the dancers perform in complete unison, close together and moving from one side of the stage to another, as though being herded by some unseen force. Alston explains the movement is about a group of people who become very close in adversity.

They get driven around, the lighting becomes very dark and the movement's all about being pulled in one direction then pulled in another. In the Second World War, it wasn't only the Jews who were put in the cattle trucks, it was the gypsies too who were taken off, persecuted and massacred.

(Richard Alston, December 2007)

Clarinet duet

As the music fades and the dancers exit, the lighting dims. A new piece of music introduces a new, more lyrical mood, as Silvestre comes back on in a pool of light in the otherwise darkened stage. Silvestre's **solo begins with him standing and staring** upstage in the direction the group has just left, perhaps as though he is recalling something he has witnessed - each section in *Gypsy Mixture* neatly segues into the next. But as the music establishes itself, he quickly begins to dance in an expansive way, as the lights brighten.

The music for this has a definite Eastern feel and the dance once again contains influences from Kathak, responding to the tabla rhythms which accompany the clarinet sound in the score, along with an electronic drum track. As Silvestre exits downstage right, Rose enters from upstage left and performs a short solo which responds minutely to the phrasing of the music, before Silvestre returns and they partner each other. The fluidity of the clarinet is expressed in the circular flow of the dance. They separate again and perform sometimes in unison, sometimes just on parallel pathways in the space. Silvestre exits and Rose dances alone, when he returns, she simply watches him for a while, before joining in once more. The music and dance end together quite abruptly and the dancers exit as the next pair enter from the same wing, upstage right.

Café duet

This is Darren and Yolanda's third duet. The soundtrack evokes a completely different mood from the previous Clarinet duet and the lighting too dims to a sepia state once again. We hear an accordion playing, not really a Parisian sound, but more of a Romanian squeezebox, and voices of people talking in an ambient space, as if in a village hall. The dancers walk on together, slowly, as if taking part in a social dance, which is echoed in their duet, with movements reminiscent of tango and a revisiting of question and answer phrases. The couple dance around the stage then walk off together the way that they came. They relate to each other throughout with their focus and the atmosphere is of intimacy, another snapshot **into a couple's life together.**

Drumming: *Crossing the Border*

As soon as the café couple depart, the music becomes more modern and menacing again and the front half of the stage is covered in a rectangle of light, whilst the back is dark. Pierre leaps on - he has only been seen in group sections up until now. After his short, dynamic solo, three women (Amie, Hannah and Yolanda) and two men (Darren and Jorge) join him, for a dance in three couples, or two groups of three. The atmosphere is more contemporary, the lighting changes so that the back of the stage is a light rectangle and the front is dark and the dancers hold sculptural shapes in pairs in the midst of leaping and kicking, changing lines and taking and giving weight.

The women have changed costume to signify that they have moved on, perhaps having left their old village. They now wear plain light coloured trousers with a halterneck top or vest in the same fabric as their gypsy dresses, so they can still be linked to their previous character.

As a gypsy voice sings 'Aie-ya!' Jonathan and Anneli, the Samba couple leap on stage and the others exit. **The Samba couple's duet is full of strong, direct** movements and energy. The other three couples return in two groups of three people as the Samba couple exit. The music becomes more frenzied as they run around the stage and reform in a line of six in the centre. This quickly breaks apart again into individual phrases, then unison, before they all run off, leaving Pierre alone once more. He dances a short solo full of leaps and arabesques, before being joined by Amie, with strong slashing arm movements. The music fades and the pair exit.



Above: Jonathan Goddard and Anneli **Binder's duet from the second half** (*Still from the DVD*)

Richard explains: 'Anneli **and Jon are the strong couple, they're the strongest, most** positive couple. They have lots of vibrant energy and a very strong connection in that Samba, then in the duet they have in the Drumming dance, when they come on one of the old guys in Taraf de Haïdouks **yells 'Aie ya!'. It's very fierce, a wild sound.** An image for me about that dance is gypsies, immigrants, whatever, crossing a border. Crossing a border at night and being caught in the torchlight. **The music's** very threatening and Anneli and Jon are very angry. Their positive force has now turned into anger about the fact that their community has been put in danger. That **to me is what's in the dance.** But the steps actually are a mixture of martial arts and samba. **If you think of their first duet, they've got the same flying apart, flying** together. **They obviously don't wiggle** their hips or anything, the playfulness is all gone. **It's got a fierce slashing of the air, it's really very angry and energetic.'**

Finale: *The Bucovina Club*

The last section is just like being in a club. Richard talks about them fleeing and ending up in Frankfurt at the Bucovina club, where they play the music of *Gypsy Mixture*.

(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)

A brass fanfare announces a more joyful mood and Jonathan dances on to stage as the drumbeat kicks in. His solo features folk style steps, leaps and jumps, shoulder **twists and rolls and stirring movements of the hand, all in Jonathan's loping style, in** which he effortlessly leaps and lands off balance, only to balance in another strong shape.

People say I've got a style, but I'm not aware of it. I literally think about position to position. I want to be as clear and clean and open as I can.

(Jonathan Goddard, February 2008)

Four of the women and three men dance on as Jonathan dances off stage - they perform in unison and in gender groups, travelling across the stage and passing **through each other's groups before exiting as Jonathan re-**enters for another solo. He exits stage left and the other dancers, nine this time, stride on from stage right in two clear lines of men and women. They dance through and round each other, forming a clump at the back of the stage, which Jonathan joins. Again, they dance in gender groups, each group in unison together. Jonathan leaves again, as the other dancers walk around the stage, in time to the triumphant sounding brass instruments on the soundtrack. They all walk forward towards the audience, then go into a unison phrase.

For me it's an interesting struggle, to find a way of making it clean, but not too rigid and set. There's so much swing in Richard's movement, so you don't want to be too specific about where your arm swings to. You've got to find that natural way through it. With *Gypsy* the movement just swirls all over the place. Jonathan's last solo is like calligraphy.

(Martin Lawrance, January 2008)

Jonathan re-enters with a spectacular leap and the other dancers remain in unison as a sort of chorus to his solo. As they stand watching him, he appears to encourage them to join him and they all dance in unison travelling exuberantly across the stage, finishing in another group in the centre. The music has a little coda at the end, where Jonathan dances a very brief solo, joined by the other dancers for the end of the phrase and they all end with a folk type stamp looking out to the audience. The mood is joyful and upbeat.

It's just wonderfully rejoicing and enjoyable music so it lifts the whole piece at the end. They've arrived somewhere and they're in a place where they're able to be happy.

(Richard Alston, December 2007)



Previous cast for *Gypsy Mixture*, 2006 (Photo: Hugo Glendinning)

Music and Costumes

Music for *Gypsy Mixture*

The music for *Gypsy Mixture* is from the album *Electric Gypsyland*, which grew out of the Bucovina Club nights at the Frankfurt theatre, started by German producer Shantel, who had discovered a passion for Balkan Gypsy music. The album is a truly cross-cultural collaboration, with tracks mixed by DJs from around the world, in Germany, the UK, Chile, Brazil, Belgium, France, The Balkans and Turkey - and of course the original music comes from Romania.

The music of *Electric Gypsyland* has travelled with 21st century speed. Transported to the Bucovina Club in Frankfurt, Germany by the DJ Shantel, Balkan music met techno and a new hybrid was formed. For this album the influence was broadened by sharing the music with DJs / re-mixers as far afield as Chile and Brazil. In Usti Usti Baba, Macedonian and Chilean brass bands are blended seamlessly; Dumbala Dumba becomes a Romanian samba and in the Fantasia the deep Mediterranean ripples of clarinet are sharpened by Asian tabla beats broken up by electric organ. So many influences, so many dance impulses have made this mesmerising music to work with, revealing new layers each time you listen.

(Richard Alston Dance Company programme note, 2007)

Richard Alston on the music

I'm constantly looking out for music and listening to music. I read about this record, *Electric Gypsyland* and I was intrigued. I found it on tour in Sheffield and I just wanted to listen to it, so I took it into the theatre and taught class using it for a couple of days. It worked so well and the dancers were obviously excited by it, that I thought I should make a piece with it. **So that's when I began to really listen to it and** think about what it actually was, how it had come to be made and so on. But the initial impulse was just curiosity.

When I look back, I'm quite interested in the tracks that I chose and the tracks that I didn't choose. I was particularly drawn to the tracks with the older members of this amazing band the Taraf de Haidouks. They are very well known, but they still come from this village near Bucharest and the two oldest members are 70 years old. So they must have lived through the whole Ceausescu era, they must have gone through harsh times - gypsies would not have been tolerated in that sort of environment.

Some of the songs they are singing, the strange raspy chants that you hear in *Gypsy Mixture*, would otherwise have just disappeared. The younger members are the more contemporary element, **more aware of what's going on in the world outside.** Those two older guys - one of them has now died - they are immensely strong characters. They wrote the Ceausescu Ballad, so they are quite politically aware.

I don't know what the songs are about, because they aren't singing in Romanian but in Gypsy Romany. Some of the songs on the album **are in Romanian and I've had** them translated for me, for instance the last dance that Jon does. But the old men, I

don't know what they're singing about. It's very strange and quite primeval really - I find that intriguing and quite moving.

All these old records were sent around the world to DJs in clubs. I realised when I **was making this piece that a DJ's job is to make people dance.** So all the rhythms they have added, the syncopations and so on are full of dance information. **I've** listened to the **original records and they're wonderful, but the music on *Electric Gypsyland*** is just packed with very vibrant dance energy. I purposely chose tracks which had a very different rhythmic impulse in them.

When I was making the piece, there was a straightforward pleasure in the music and in the dancers reacting to the music. I was concerned not to make a romp, just a very jolly jumping around piece. There seemed to be a lot of darker elements in the music.

In that first track the brass band that sounds like an eastern European oompah band is actually all coming from a village in Chile. Then at a certain point they do this wonderful dance facing each other with arms, they kind of wave at each other and **there's a little figure (hums music) - that's actually the** first Macedonian brass band from eastern Europe. **So that's a very straightforward example of how this record is** made up of different kinds of music.

I love the fact that on this record they've put in all sorts of village sounds. I could have edited them or chosen not to use them, but the children and the bike and the dog and the accordion in the café are all to me part of the atmosphere of the thing.

Tracks used from *Electric Gypsyland*:

Track 3: *Usti Usti Baba* (1st group section and Dog solo)

Track 4: *Dumbala Dumba* (Samba duet)

Track 8: *Cuculetsu* (Tribes)

Track 10: *Fantasia for Clarinet* (Clarinet duet)

Track 11: *Mugur Mugurel* (Crossing the Border)

Track 5: *Lest Sexy* (finale)

About Taraf de Haïdouks

Taraf de Haïdouks is a group of Romanian Roma musicians, from the town of Clejani, the best known group of their kind in Romania since Communism came to an end.

They are known in their native Romania as *Taraful Haiducilor*, loosely translated as *band of outlaws*.

The group formed in 1989, shortly before the death of **Romania's** dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. However, they were discovered by a Romanian ethnomusicologist, who first recorded them six years earlier in 1983 for the archive of The Institute for Ethnography and Folklore.

The original group comprised about twelve musicians, but later it included up to thirty.

Since 1991, when they were brought to Belgium by two record producers and were signed up by the Crammed Discs label, they have recorded four albums and toured the world. *Electric Gypsyland* features three other Balkan Gypsy bands - Ursari de Clejani, Koçani Orkestar and Mahala Rai Banda.



Photograph of gypsy musicians by Josef Koudelka

Costume Design for *Gypsy Mixture*

Peter Todd talks about his costume designs

As with Richard, my initial starting point when creating a design for the company is the music. With *Gypsy Mixture* I was immediately inspired by the bold energy and variety of sound and style incorporated into the rich mix - at once traditional and highly contemporary, at times vivid, bright and fun, at others brooding, foreboding.

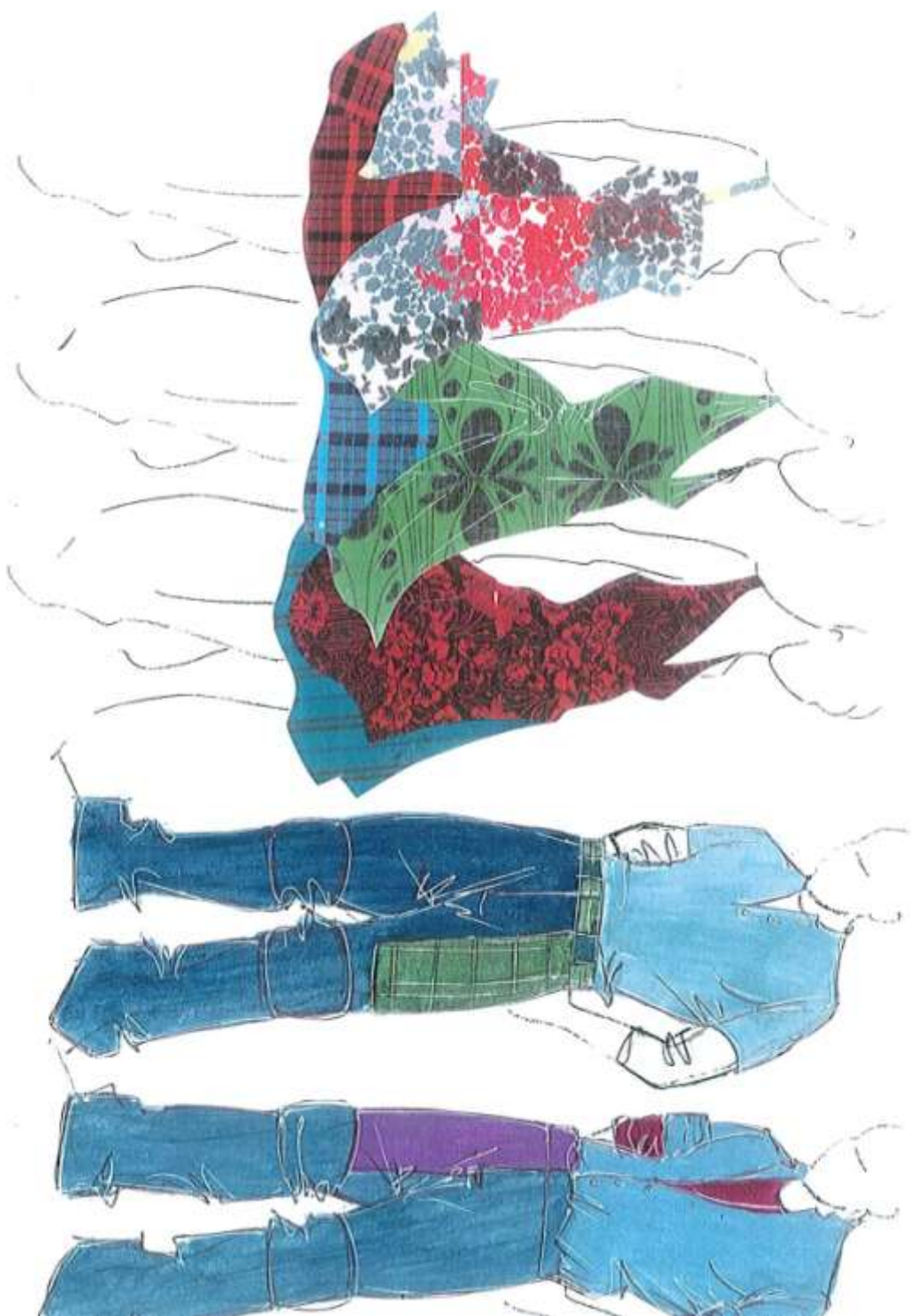
Richard and I were keen to stay away from a typical design of 'gypsy' outfits, in favour of a much more stylish and contemporary look. I did reference traditional images of Romanian gypsies, and indeed images of the band behind *Electric Gypsyland* themselves, together with images of the work of fashion designer Vivienne Westwood. I was inspired by the jumbled, unexpected use of styles and fabrics, a mish-mash of patterns, prints, fabrics and colours creating bold individual statements. For me this was the essence of the music - a fantastic wild collaboration, that shouldn't work - but does!

I decided that the garments themselves should be contemporary and casual, light and summery. For the boys, t-shirts, vests, open shirts and trousers, cut in a jeans style. For the girls, full skirts and knee length dresses, the volume of fabric allowing for greater movement and energy in the costume.

With the basic garments decided, the fun and real essence of the design could be explored through the use of colour and fabric. For the girls I found a wild range of boldly coloured and printed cottons, floral and abstract prints in fuchsia pink, lilac, vivid green and a wonderful floral in yellow, red, blue and black! The addition of an underskirt to the dresses allowed for the combination of two contrasting fabrics to be used in each costume and for these I used cottons with bold stripes and checks dyed in a range of blues and greens - one in bold scarlet red.

With such a broad vivid palette for the girls' costumes the boys' outfits needed to provide a somewhat more subdued and simple foil. There is still colour here, with the boys' costumes often drawing colour from their respective female partners in the piece - t-shirts in red and shades of blues and green echoing the colours of the girls' underskirts - but each wears trousers in air-force blue, an almost denim blue, that gives the overall look one necessary constant. The overall look is, I hope, bold, colourful, vibrant and contemporary.

*The following page shows some of **Peter Todd's costume designs**.*



Starting Points

Source Material

A visual source for *Gypsy Mixture* was the absolutely amazing photographs of Josef Koudelka, a Czech photographer who published a book called *Gypsies*. **They're** very stark pictures, images full of allusions to death, allusions to old gypsy traditions and to the extraordinary relationship between an eastern European Romany and his horse, the amazing way that they are actually in tune with animals. There is a whole extraordinary, quite harsh culture that is behind the music. (Richard Alston, December 2007)

Sense of Community in *Gypsy Mixture*

I think the thing to emphasise in all the elements I've spoken about, of hardship and the fact that gypsy life can be quite harsh, is that there's this really positive side, which is that a close community becomes a very strong community. I find that really the main driving force behind *Gypsy Mixture*. I talk to the dancers all the time about **the fact that if we're rehearsing in order to be together, it's not to make beautiful abstract shapes that are precise, it's to show that they are as one, that they are a** very strong community and that is a very positive thing, which is what makes the piece feel - I think - very joyful. **It's a very affirmative and reassuring piece about** humanity. And the humanity of that mixed culture is something I think is very wonderful and to be celebrated.

(Richard Alston, December 2007)



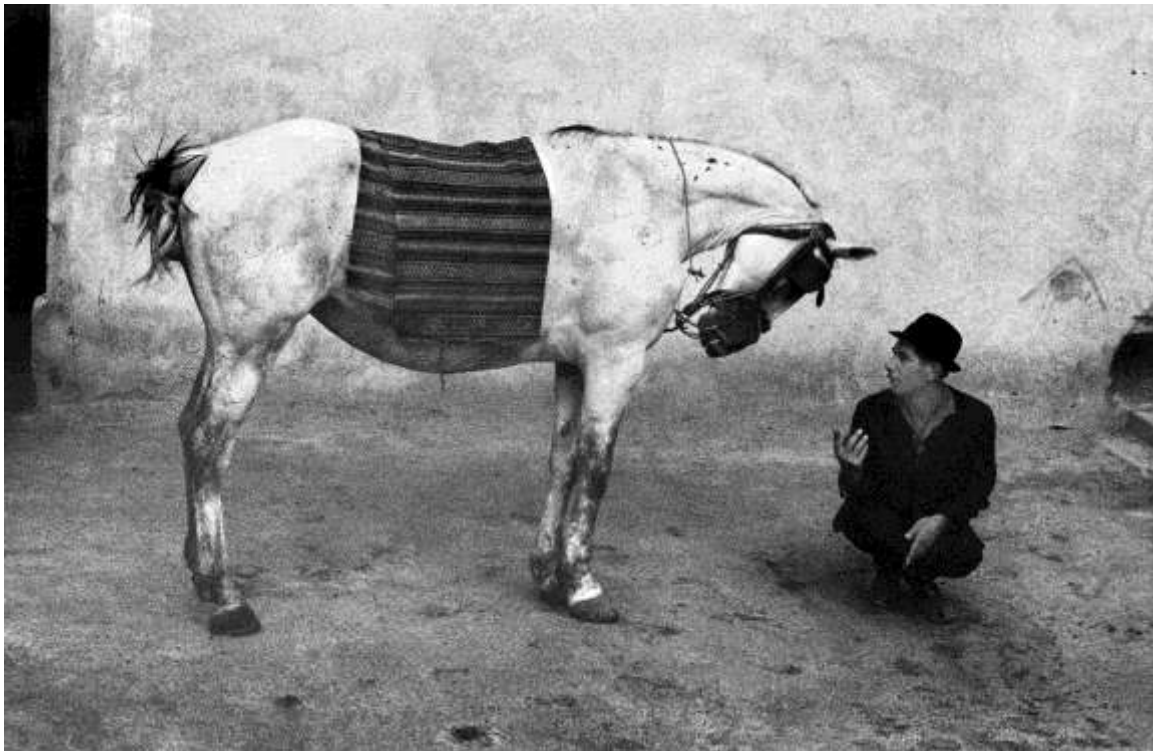
Photograph by Josef Koudelka

About Photographer, Josef Koudelka

Josef Koudelka was born in 1938 in Czechoslovakia. Interested in photography from an early age, he graduated in 1961 from the Technical University in Prague and later worked as an aeronautical engineer. He began photographing theatre productions, then, in 1968 he witnessed and recorded Soviet armies as they invaded Prague and crushed the Czech resistance, before he was forced to flee the country. His pictures of the events became award-winning dramatic international symbols (though he published them anonymously at first). **This proved a turning point in Koudelka's life and career.**

In 1970 he was granted asylum in England, where he lived for the next ten years. He continued to travel around Europe hoping to capture something of a world that he felt was vanishing before his eyes. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Koudelka exhibited and published collections of his photographs, including *Gypsies* (1975) and *Exiles* (1988). In 1987 he became a French citizen, and returned to Czechoslovakia for the first time in 1990, producing *Black Triangle*, which documented **his country's** wasted landscape.

Throughout his career, Koudelka has been praised for his ability to capture the presence of the human spirit amidst dark landscapes. Desolation, waste, departure, despair and alienation are common themes in his work – alongside the endurance of human endeavor, despite its fragility. His later work focuses on landscape, rather than human subjects.



Photograph by Josef Koudelka

The Real Gypsies

Romany people (Roma) can be found all over the world in many ethnic groups and have a distinct ethnic culture with its own traditions and dialect. The popular idea of gypsies has an imaginative appeal - free, wandering spirits, who appear in literature and folklore from many cultures. Essentially, they are travelling people, nomads, although in reality many gypsies now live in permanent housing. **The name 'gypsy' is thought to have developed from the word 'Egyptians', although Roma people are believed to originate from India.**



Many former Eastern bloc countries have significant Roma populations - Romania estimates the number of Roma at between 500,000 and 1,000,000. Even today, gypsies often live on the margins of society, facing discrimination and prejudice from the non-Roma population. Historically, they have often been made scapegoats in times of misfortune, such as being blamed for spreading the bubonic plague.

Left: Romanian gypsy girls

500,000 Romanian gypsies were murdered in World War II

Throughout history, Roma people have been persecuted, at times on a massive scale. For centuries, in parts of Romania, gypsies were legally enslaved. Around the world, governments have variously prohibited the use of the Romany language, taken Romany children away from their parents and placed them in orphanages, forbidden Roma inter-marriage and removed rights to own property such as horses and wagons, which form the basis of traditional Roma trades. During World War II Roma persecution reached a peak of ethnic cleansing - the Romanian regime alone deported around 500,000 gypsies from their homes, most of whom were gassed in Nazi concentration camps.

Traditionally, Roma people consider non-Roma to be **'spiritually unclean'** and that, combined with fear of persecution, encourages them to lead more segregated lives, although in most EU countries, an effort has been made to integrate Roma people into the wider society, with practices such as begging with young children now illegal.

Inferior education

Many Roma children receive a comparatively poor education and in some countries they are routinely educated in all-Roma schools, or even in schools for children with learning difficulties, regardless of their abilities. This often leads to under-achievement and a greater chance of unemployment, thus perpetuating the negative image of gypsies as thieves and beggars. In recent times there have been reports of communities vandalising, or even burning down Roma homes.

More positively, some countries now have Roma political parties and Roma members of the European Parliament, campaigning for more favourable legislation for gypsies. **In the UK, gypsies come under the category of 'travellers', which includes 'Irish travellers' and 'New Age travellers' as well as Roma.** In recent years, access to many of their traditional stopping places has been refused, which in 2005 became an issue for the general election, with politicians pledging to review the Human Rights Act. Traditional Roma people in the UK still use a form of dialect and tend to keep to their own communities, although efforts have been made by the authorities to ensure decent housing, healthcare and regular schooling for the children of travellers.



Above: The official Roma flag

Interviews

Interview with Martin Lawrance, Rehearsal Director

15 January 2008



As a dancer you always get stuck in with Richard. When I danced *Gypsy Mixture*, I did two solos and lots of duets **and because I've been with Richard a long time, he** knows the way I move. There are only two dancers left of the original ten - and me, **but obviously I'm on the** outside now. So it was interesting going back to what Richard originally **wanted, especially for parts I hadn't done before because I wasn't in the studio when they** were being created. We went back to the original studio footage of rehearsals and you see how it changed for **the last revival and how it's changed with this cast.** The second time it was restaged there were only two new dancers, so it wasn't a big shift around.

I find it really interesting watching Richard make work. **I don't know where he gets it from, because he doesn't make steps or phrases himself.** He knows the music so well **that he'll choreograph something and you'll do it with the music and realise it's** finished at the end of the phrase. How does he do that?! **It's totally organic.**

When I choreograph, I find myself getting to a point where the dancers are **completely in a knot and I say 'how are you going to get out of that?'** And then I might say, **'no that looks a bit too easy.'** Richard sometimes simplifies things, especially in group unisons, whereas I keep adding things. Having only just retired I see it more from the inside. I walk around them in a circle so I can see all different angles. **More and more when I choreograph I'm getting** my own voice, but it still sits comfortably with Richard's **work in the rep.** The dancers enjoy doing something different in the rep too.

When he was making *Gypsy Mixture*, Richard discussed some of his influences with us, but sometimes you can give too much information and then people start to act a character, **which he doesn't want. It's** all there in the music and the movement and you need some kind of intention behind it, so he gives us more of an insight, rather than asking us to go off and research things. For example, he put some pictures up on the notice board. On tour, he also used the music for class and everyone just loved it. **I told him if he didn't make a piece to it everyone would be angry.** So he did!

We've been doing *Gypsy* for a couple of years now, on and off. **It's a hard piece to do, but nobody's** bored with it yet. **There's so much detail in there.** Also, Richard says **'They're gypsies, you might be from a different village', so there's perhaps more** freedom to do the movement as you like. **It's harder on me though, because as** rehearsal director I watch and see an arm in the wrong place and it looks wrong to me. **I just have to tell myself 'they're from another village'!**

Nine times out of ten, **I don't really say a lot. In Richard's new piece, *Shuffle It Right,*** it'll be interesting when it goes on tour to see how it might start to change. I'll have to say **'you were a little bit late there'.** Especially in the unison sections. **He's using**

very fast music and it's all very jazzy and quite loose. So that's just a rehearsal director's nightmare!

I've taught quite a few of Richard's pieces at dance schools and so on and I find it really interesting to go back to the original source. Where did that movement come from? It came from that particular dancer. What was it about that dancer that I need to get from another (often very different) dancer? **Luckily I've never had to teach anyone Jonathan's parts yet. If I did, I'd probably have to get him to come and teach it, because he's so individual** - in a great way. All of those solos were made on him, all the little jiggy moves of the hip. **Richard's got ten dancers and everyone is very different. For me it's an interesting struggle, to find a way of making it clean, but not too rigid and set.**

There's so much swing in Richard's movement, so you don't want to be too specific about where your arm swings to. You've got to find that natural way through it. In *Fingerprint* **we have to be more correct, because it's got more classical arms and ports de bras.** But with *Gypsy* it just swirls all over the place. **Jonathan's last solo is like calligraphy.**

If I can come back to the original source and teach the steps, then Richard can push it however he wants to with that dancer. As a dancer, I can pick up steps very quickly, so over the years **I've been in the studio and I've been lucky to be able to** watch him choreograph on other people, or on me, and I know what the movement feels like. Then I can pass that knowledge on to other people. Sometimes Richard is very specific about what he wants. He might ask someone to look at another **dancer's torso and say 'I want it like that'. Every reconstruction's different in a positive way for that group. I teach the steps correctly, but people are different and that's exciting.**

I've always been good at picking up steps. Both my parents are deaf, so since I was three **I've done sign language. I'm used to doing everything really quickly and** watching carefully. **I'm really quick at picking up stuff on video. In a way that's how I** got my job with Richard. I was **in 4D (LCDS's postgraduate performing company) and** Henri (Oguike, former dancer with RADC) got injured. Richard had worked with me in 4D, doing *Roughcut* and he asked me to step in. I had to learn *Petrushka* in a week, a twenty minute piece on my own in the studio off a video. Kenneth Tharp came in to teach me a few bits, then the Company came in for one day for all the lifting bits, then I was off performing it in Germany. I enjoy it. I get quite impatient sometimes **especially when I'm choreographing, because** I can see it and other people might not have got it yet. So I have to slow down!

There are lots of challenges for the dancers in *Gypsy Mixture*. Stamina for some. Really severe side lighting and other lighting states for others. Spacing in some sections has to be spot on. **It's traffic** control a lot of the time - for example in Tribes, which has five men and five women crossing through each other. And the lighting is quite hard. I have to make sure that they are spot on with their spacing in the studio, then we just have to worry about the lighting on stage. **I'm a firm believer** in the idea that the more we get movement and spacing inside our bodies in the studio, the more it makes our lives enjoyable on stage, because you can just dance.

Richard's very much like that too. We don't flog the piece, but try to get the feeling of the movement inside. Where's the movement coming from? How far can I travel if I'm trying to maintain a diagonal line? If we really get that feeling inside us in rehearsal, then on stage **it's just second nature. Suddenly you're on stage, you get that adrenaline surge and you want to do everything bigger. But if everyone's doing that together it works. Richard's choreography uses a lot of travelling anyway, it's all quite big.**

I think the DVD looks fantastic. **It's hard stopping and starting, we do that a lot in photo shoots. It's hard on the body, but it means that some of the sections are very tiring and the dancers can give their all to just a little bit of a section, rather than doing the whole thing. We did a couple of full run throughs, so they've got lots of continuity shots where the dancers all look quite tired and sweaty!**

When we're in the studio we do an hour and a half's class, either ballet or contemporary. When we're on tour, it's an hour's class on stage, which is a preparation to get used to the auditorium. We don't do class in any other dance styles.

What I love about Richard's pieces is that they're all very different, because the music's so different. If you look at *Shuffle It Right* and *Gypsy Mixture* they couldn't be further apart. *Gypsy's* more 'now', it's got club beats, whereas Hoagy Carmichael is 20's and 30's, all on the piano. They're very rhythmic.

Richard and I look at the rep and decide what pieces work together. A full evening is usually three pieces. Richard decided he needed to make a 'closer' this year, which is *Shuffle It Right*. **I'm making a 'middle' piece (*Body and Soul*) and we're keeping *Fingerprint* which is an 'opener'.**

Body and Soul is a little bit sad. **The music's beautiful; Schumann's Dichterliebe, for piano and baritone singer which we're going to have live on stage. It's quite intimate and I've been looking at Casper David Friedrich's paintings a lot, where there's a beautiful sunset and just these two figures silhouetted. It's for six dancers, with lots of duets. I've got an ending that I want to try out. It's centred around Pierre and Silvestre but also Pierre and Yolande and Pierre and Anneli - he's got these relationships going on. I want to get to the point where in the last bit, Pierre can choose who he wants to do his last duet with there and then on stage. So I'm trying to make some kind of connections, so that it would make sense for any of them to finish the piece with Pierre.**

The last couple of lines of the song are 'the reason the coffin is so heavy and vast is because I put my heart in it'. I loved the music, picked it up for another composer. It's a piece that really should be done live and I had that opportunity this year.

Interview with Jonathan Goddard and Amie Brown

4 March 2008

*At the time of interview, Jonathan had been dancing with RADC since 2002. At 28, he had recently become the first contemporary dancer to win Best Male Dancer at the National Dance Awards, a prize previously won by Cuban ballet dancer Carlos Acosta. **He discussed training, technique and Richard's unique way of working with Amie Brown, who was 24 and had been dancing with the company since 2005 when she started as an apprentice.***



Amie Brown and Jonathan Goddard in rehearsal
(Photo: Yolande Yorke-Edgell)

Training

I had absolutely no idea what contemporary dance was!

Both dancers experienced a similar early training, with ballet, jazz and musical theatre from the age of five. Jonathan admits that when he went to Rambert School **at the age of 16, 'I had absolutely no idea what contemporary dance was!'** Amie, who now has an MA from London Contemporary Dance School, was enlightened at secondary school. **'We used to go in to school at 7.30am every Thursday to do a Cunningham based class.'**

After A Levels, Amie joined London Contemporary Dance School (at The Place, where RADC is based) and completed the three year BA Dance. On graduating, she successfully auditioned for an Apprenticeship with RADC as a Postgraduate Diploma. A year later, she was offered a full time job with the Company, studying for another year to turn her diploma into an MA, based on her performance in the Company. **'Richard doesn't take an apprentice every year. When you're an apprentice you're treated as a member of the Company - except the other dancers tease you a lot! You start off doing a whole company piece in the autumn season. After that, new pieces come in and casts change, so Richard gets you to cover other people's parts, duets, little solos and so on. Apprentices don't always get a job at the end of the year - Richard discusses your progress a couple of times during the year, which is quite scary!'**

Jonathan danced with Scottish Dance Theatre, a repertory company in Dundee, before successfully auditioning for RADC in 2002. **'It was brilliant working with lots of different choreographers, but I missed being in London. While I was in Scotland I saw Richard Alston's *Roughcut* and I loved the travelling and the jumping in it, big movements rather than standing on the spot and being innovative! I liked the aesthetic and the way his dancers looked.'**

Company Routine

Jonathan and Amie testify to the hard physical graft of a dancer's working life. On a rehearsal day at The Place, they arrive early for class, to warm up before the daily class. **Jonathan describes it as 'resetting' his body from the day before. 'I do a 35 minute Pilates based floor barre, which is gentle stretching, so I'm always at the same place before I start class at eleven o'clock.'** The dancers take two ballet and three contemporary classes each week, the latter taught mainly by Richard Alston and Martin Lawrance. The daily class follows a similar structure, but the dancers **don't object to the repetition. Jonathan explains, 'A lot of it is to do with maintenance, making sure we've got the strength and stamina to perform consistently. We don't do release or floor work because Richard's choreography doesn't often go to the floor.'** After class, we have a fifteen minute break with a cup of tea and maybe a biscuit!!'

Rehearsals take place for the rest of the day, from 12.45 to 2pm, then again from 3 until 6.15pm. Difficulties arise because the Company only has one studio and, although The Place is full of dance studios, the School needs them. **Richard's work consists largely of duets and solos, so dancers not required don't stay in the studio to watch, unless they are covering a part. But even this is rare - the Company only has ten dancers, so if someone is injured there often isn't anyone else who knows the part and they have to act quickly. Amie recalls learning a part in the afternoon to perform that evening.**

Touring

When the Company tours the UK, they mostly perform just one or two nights at each venue. So the first day is spent on technical details, even though the technical team **will have done the 'get-in' the previous day.** The dancers arrive at the theatre **around midday to warm up on stage for their class at one o'clock.** Class is reduced to an hour on tour and is always Cunningham and usually without music. **'Richard sometimes tries out music he's thinking of using in a piece - that's what happened with the *Gypsy Mixture* music and we all liked it. He also likes singing!'**

Tech days are really hard

After class, the dancers have half an hour's break, then the afternoon is devoted to a 'tech run', for lighting and sound. Because they need to get used to the different space and the lights, the dancers prefer to run the pieces fully, rather than just **'marking'.** Amie admits she is paranoid about this - **'I always like to do things full out, because otherwise when I get to the show I panic if I haven't done it properly.'** Jonathan agrees this is also very tiring. **'By the time the audience gets in we've**

already run the programme once. **Tech days are really hard, but we don't do long tours and we're always changing the rep, so we need to do it properly in each venue to get used to it.'**

Following the run, the dancers take a break and eat something light, do their hair, make-up and then another warm-up. They thrive on routine. **Jonathan says: 'Most of us always eat the same things, like pasta and bananas. Not too much at once. I drink coke and eat chocolate as well, because it gives you a quick boost and I get really tired. We all have our own little routine, because then you don't have to think and you can save your energy for the performance.'**



Left: Jonathan Goddard in Nigredo. (Still from the DVD 2007)

Technique

After six years with the Company Jonathan believes his dancing has improved and the critics would certainly agree! He feels it is to do with clarity of movement. **'I've got a lot better at it! My body now just about does what I want it to, which it didn't before. I always want to be as clear and clean and open as I can. People say I've got a style, but I'm not aware of it.** I always look to see how to connect things up. I literally think about position to position. I think my dancing has become a lot clearer and people read the intentions better. When I see that in a review it really pleases me, because it's abstract work and I think I can communicate it well now.'

You can get bogged down in technique

Jonathan believes communicating with the audience is an important aspect often overlooked in contemporary dance. **'You can get really bogged down in technique,** because the movement is abstract, but the audience wants to connect with your **performance.'** The answer for him lay in recalling his enjoyment of performing when he used to do musical theatre.

He aims to vary his performance in each piece. **'I don't try to find a character, but I try to find a way of dancing that's different for every piece. So if you watch three Alston pieces in an evening they're all different. That's really important to me. I don't think of a narrative through-line.'**

Over the years, Jonathan has enjoyed the challenge of developing his technique through the choreography. **'Sometimes when Richard gives me a step I try to make it into something that will challenge me, like my flexibility. If you have to get your leg up really high, you keep doing it and eventually you can do it easily. You can use a piece to change the way you dance and Richard's really up for that.'**

Every time I go off stage, I'm gasping

Of his final solo in *Gypsy Mixture* he says, **'It's no longer technically difficult - it was when we first made it - but aerobically it's really tough. I'm jumping every other step and really zipping around the stage. Literally every time I go off stage I'm gasping, it actually hurts my insides. Probably in 20 years time I'll find it's done some irreparable damage! I contort my body and when I come off I feel like I've pushed everything around. We did it here once for the students and there were no wings, so everyone could see the effect it has on me! You can't fake it. I always try to give each performance that something extra. You have to keep the energy up. That's why the audience clap I think!'**

Amie agrees. **'With *Gypsy Mixture*, everything's got to be so sharp and you have about ten seconds off stage then you have to go back on with the same energy. My lungs hurt afterwards! I've often been told because I'm small that I need to put more weight into my movement. Since I've been with the Company I've tried to make my movements stronger and use more attack. I've been doing the same part in *Gypsy* that I did two years ago and recently I've started to find another way of doing it. I hope people have noticed!'**

Choreographic Process

Richard has developed a 'wait and see' approach with his choreography, observing what his dancers do with his choreography before he decides what he wants. Amie explains, 'If you were doing something in a way that went against what he had in mind, then he would say something about it. But he sits back and watches it first.'

Jonathan expands; **'He likes subtlety. He wants us to find it more than be given it - if he gave us too much information then we might overdo it. He wouldn't necessarily show us the source material, but he might say something after it's been made. With the Samba in *Gypsy Mixture*, he said he wanted the idea of switching, changing directions, which made me think of ice skating.'**



Shimmer, 2004. (Photo: Hugo Glendinning)

Over the years, Jonathan has notched up an impressive number of pieces. **'I loved doing *Volumina*, that's been my favourite, because it was something different. The Company had been together for a while and Richard really played with the structure. I was allowed to improvise a bit. It was to Ligeti organ music, more like a sound score. Also we had bare legs - when I came to the Company I always wore shorts and I finally got it into the work!'**

Amie explains the process. **'Richard doesn't usually use improvisation. With *Volumina* we learned a phrase of movement and then changed the directions and speed, choosing moments to pause. We could pick up on something someone else was doing, but edit it and rewind or fast forward. We weren't generating the movement exactly.'**

Above: Jonathan Goddard in

Jonathan danced a duet where they took the set material, but could order it however they wanted. **'It was like if you smashed a mirror and you had all these little pieces, then you could put the mirror back together in any way you liked. You couldn't actually make up new steps, but sometimes the transitions felt a bit like that. It was more making decisions than improvising. Totally not usual to the way we work. There weren't counts or anything, so we really had to be aware of each other, it makes you feel like a Company.'**

Amie recalls they could decide when to come on to stage as well, so every performance was different. **'It was really exciting. Sometimes you'd end up face to face with someone unexpected. *Volumina* was the first piece I ever did with the Company. I liked the clear lines it demanded from your body. It was very sculptural in the angles and lines. The timing and the musicality were very difficult.'**

Amie enjoyed dancing *Devil in the Detail* too and now *Shuffle it Right*. **'They're fun to perform and happy - my jazz past creeps back!'** Of *Gypsy Mixture* she says, **'The music is so much fun that you have to smile.'** Jonathan agrees; **'It's really easy to respond to the music. It's brilliant for the audience.'**

For us, it's very structured, there's not that freedom that we had in *Volumina*, but then the audience tended not to like that!

The Making of *Gypsy Mixture*

Jonathan has always danced the same part in *Gypsy Mixture*. **'It was the first time that I'd worked with Richard on my own in the studio.** When he was making material I had some influence, but not huge amounts. **He's very verbal, he uses words. It's** clever in a way, because he knows what he wants, but what he shows you is quite ambiguous. **He's got an idea of what it could be, but he's searching for what it would be in your body.'**

Amie explains, 'in a group section, we'll all try to interpret what he wants, then he might see something and say 'oh yes, I like that one, do it like that. As individual dancers you decide how you want to do it. He gives you the step, the rhythm and the timing - **he's sometimes specific with dynamics, but you do have the freedom to perform it the way you want to.'**



Left: Jonathan Goddard in Fingerprint, 2006 (Photo: Hugo Glendinning)

I'm not a purist!

Jonathan's working relationship with Richard has changed over the years. **'Now we'd work more collaboratively. He'd give me the bare bones really. Then I'd go away and work on it. My last solo is like a fiesta party feel, I tried to put that in without destroying the choreography. He likes those little quirks in the Samba and the audience like them too, it's best if they come naturally. I'm quite willing to do any sort of movements, all the bum wiggles and stuff. Probably other people might not want to, but I enjoy all the jazzy stuff. I'm not ashamed of using that kind of thing. Some dancers might feel uncomfortable as it's not really contemporary dance. I'm not a purist in any sense!'**

It looks as though it might mean something

Gypsy Mixture is not a narrative piece, but there is a sense of place. Amie chooses to think of herself as a young girl in a tribe, not as a particular character. **'His dances are about individuals on stage and how they relate to each other. They communicate a possibility that there might be a narrative there. You can read it how you want. He gives us images.'**

Jonathan describes creating the Tribes section. **'Richard mentioned the intention, but he structured it so that we were really close together. When he's making it, it's nuts and bolts, he's trying to get it done. Siobhan Davies gives you an image for almost every movement, but Richard's not like that.** I think he hints at narrative - it looks as though it might mean something. I try to make my performance open enough for everyone to put what they want on it.'

Richard makes parts specifically for people

Amie first performed *Gypsy Mixture* with the original cast and thinks **it's very** different now. **'The steps are all the same, but a quality that a person has can give a different look to it. Richard likes seeing things done on different people.'**

Jonathan believes *Gypsy Mixture* was based on the people Richard made it on. **'Richard makes parts specifically for people, to pull out something in them. It was made at a time when the Company were all friends, similar ages and we all got on very well. You see it as a gang of people and that's kind of what the Company was at that time. We've toured Gypsy probably more than any other piece in the repertoire.'**

Workshop Ideas

Workshop Ideas for *Gypsy Mixture*

The following workshop ideas can be used with a variety of groups. They can link directly to choreography taken from *Gypsy Mixture* with creative developments, or they can be used simply as creative ideas. The aim is to study some of the influences and methods used by Richard Alston to develop his choreography for *Gypsy Mixture*.

Richard Alston Dance Company trains in Cunningham based technique, so it is helpful if Cunningham style tilts and curves can be introduced into the warm-up, to give the students an idea of the movement vocabulary used in the choreography.

Watch the DVD of *Gypsy Mixture* and consider the following aspects of Richard Alston's choreography:

- Use of duets
- Relationships between dancers in the space
- Spacing of large groups
- **The body 'line'**
- Use of contact and floor work
- Relationship with the music
- Contrasting sections, eg the first group dance and the penultimate group dance (sextet)

'I'm drawn to duets, because when you've got two people all they have to do is lean on each other and you've already got something very sculptural. The dance that I make is very sculptural. I'm interested in sharp changes of direction.'

'I like the notion that movement can leave energy behind it, like waving a sparkler around in the garden, that energy can make a line. So I often talk to the dancers about movement which I think of as a thrust of a sword or a swipe into the space. And to me that makes space.'

(Richard Alston, 2007)

Workshop 1: Question and Answer

This section goes to track 8 (Cuculetsu) on the album *Electric Gypsyland*, which counts in a phrase of 5. **Look at the full company group section 'Tribes', where the dancers are in groups of men and women on opposite sides of the stage.** Create a short sequence (approximately 6 x 5 counts) in a similar style which incorporates the following movements:

- Open and closed shapes
- Turn and balance
- Leaning forward and backwards
- Leg and arm crossing the body and opening out
- Tilt and travel
- **'Sparkler' image of an energy trail left behind the body as it moves** (this image could be used as a warm-up exercise)

Duet:

- With a partner, adapt the phrase as a **'question and answer'**, so A dances their first movement, then B does their first movement and so on.
- Be aware of your relationship in the space, so that the end of A's movement initiates B's movement and so on.
- **Add a moment of contact, where one partner takes the other's weight.**
- Find a way to travel around your partner before initiating the next movement.
- Think about a verbal conversation - for example, it could be excited, bored, or an argument. How does that mood change the dynamics of the movement, ie. some parts may now overlap, or there could be pauses in different places. Use focus within the dance - non-verbal communication. What relationships **are suggested by the dancers' focus?**

Option for the whole group:

- Choose one duet to teach the rest of the group their sequence, so that half the class learns **A's part**, the other half **B's**.
- Find a way for one group to travel through the other group to the other side of the space.
- The other duets can be added on after the group section.

Workshop 2: Push and Pull

This workshop relates to the first full Company section in the middle of *Gypsy Mixture*, **which the Company refer to as 'Tribes'**. No actual dance sequences need to **be taught from the piece, but it could also follow on from the 'Question and Answer'** workshop, which relates to the same section.

Whole group activity:

- Start in a clump – either half the group or whole group, depending on numbers. Imagine you are being herded to one side of the space, then the other and travel across the room.
- As you travel, take turns to fall out of the clump and be pulled back in. Try to do this in a variety of ways, ie using different directions, levels or body parts.
- Build up speed, so that it starts slowly, with no-one falling out, then gradually builds momentum. Try to move together as a group.

Pair activity:

- Push and pull – in pairs initiate movement from your partner by alternately pushing and pulling. What are the transitional movements?
- Try the same movement, but without any contact. How can you make it travel?
- Choose your best four movements as a couple and show them to the rest of the group.

Whole group activity:

- As a group, decide on approximately eight of the most effective movements and link them together.
- Add this new phrase into the bigger 'clump' movements. Can you use it to get one half of the group to travel through the other half? Decide on a formation and use canon.



Above: 'Tribes' group dance (Still from the DVD)

Workshop 3: Rag Bag

I'm a very impure choreographer, I chuck into my work anything that I want. So if people think it looks classical, that's fine, I don't mind. But there are all sorts of things in there. It's a rag bag really.

(Richard Alston, December 2007)



Above: First group dance (Still from the DVD)

Group discussion:

Watch the first group section of *Gypsy Mixture* on the DVD and write down all the movements you can see that you think were influenced by **traditional 'folk'** dance.

Discuss the features of the style of 'folk dance' used in *Gypsy Mixture*. How does it differ from ballet and contemporary technique?

- Are the **feet** turned out? Are they flexed or pointed?
- Which **parts** of the feet are used? How are they used?
- Is there any **contact** between the dancers?
- Do the dancers use different **levels**?
- How do the dancers use the **space**?
- Do the dancers use **canon** and **unison**?
- Are particular dancers **leading** or **following**?

Pairs to Quartet activity:

In pairs, create your own traditional style dance, which includes the following:

- Meeting and parting
- A step which uses two parts of the foot
- A way of passing one another
- One of the folk-style steps that you noticed from *Gypsy Mixture*

Join with another pair to turn your duets into a quartet.

Whole group activity:

As a group, invent your own circle dance. Start with a simple structure, such as holding hands and circling one way for eight counts, change direction for eight counts. Add in movements such as galloping away from the circle with a partner and galloping back, clapping hands, stamping etc. Add in some of the partner dances too.



Above: First group dance (Still from the DVD)

Group discussion:

Has Richard Alston used traditional dance in any other of his works?

Look at other choreographers' work and how they have used elements of folk dance.

For example:

Ghost Dances (particularly the Tie Dance) or ***Sergeant Early's Dream*** by Christopher Bruce

Still Life at the Penguin Café by David Bintley

The Rite of Spring (Vaslav Nijinsky)

The Dream / La Fille Mal Gardée by Frederick Ashton

Jjanke by Charles Linehan (performed by George Piper Dances - now known as Balletboyz - as part of *Encore*)

What parallels can you draw between these dances and *Gypsy Mixture*? Look in particular at the following:

- How the dancers use the space
- Identifiable traditional dance steps
- How the dancers relate to one another
- Formations within the structure of the dance
- Relationship with the music



Above: First group dance (Still from the DVD)

Below: Amie Brown teaching an Essential Alston workshop (Photo: Benedict Johnson)



Further Reading

Further Reading

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judson_Dance_Theater Judson Church Theater

www.trishabrowncompany.org

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHIJotxOUOE Steve Paxton- contact improvisation

www.lucindachilds.com

www.mercecunningham.org

marthagraham.org

www.dorishumphrey.org

www.youtube.com/user/Darshansinghbhuller#p/u/5/TzkABVmkGhk Six part Robert Cohan documentary

releasedance.com

www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7N2B05hgnU Siobhan Davies

trove.nla.gov.au/result?q=Ian+Spink Ian Spink

www.rambert.org.uk/ramberts_history

www.ashtonarchive.com/

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgejL1rSZCA Example of Bournonville choreography

www.kathak.org/site/kathak/

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarantella

www.youtube.com/watch?v=prQOdTmF8u0 Bharata Natyam

www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk/

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVspqShcXSA West Side Story, Sharks V Jets

www.bucovina.de/

www.ceausescu.org/

Gypsy Mixture Production Credits

Choreographer	Richard Alston
Dancers	
Hat Duet:	Darren Ellis, Yolande Yorke-Edgell
Clarinet Duet:	Silvestre Sanchez Strattner, Rose Sudworth
Samba Duet:	Jonathan Goddard, Anneli Binder
Drumming section solo:	Pierre Tapon
Other dancers:	Amie Brown, Hannah Kidd, Jorge Brea Salgueiro
Music	Tracks from the CD <i>Electric Gypsyland</i> (used by arrangement with Crammed Discs CRAW32, www.crammed.be)
Lighting	Charles Balfour
Costumes	Peter Todd
Photographs	Josef Koudelka (copyright Josef Koudelka / Magnum Photos)

DVD Production Credits

For Singh Productions

Lighting Cameraman	Mike Fox
Assistant Camera	Chris Cox and Matt Fox
Sound	Tommy Hair
Make-up	Anita Griffin
Runner	Miranda Letten
Colour Lab	Stanley Productions
Producer	Sallie Anne Estep Bhuller
Directed and Edited	Darshan Singh Bhuller

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Background Pack compiled 2008 by Sarah Dekker, RADDC Education Officer.

Thanks to Marie Forbes, Martin Lawrance, Jonathan Goddard, Amie Brown, Martin Collins, Peter Todd, Chris May, Chris Thomson, Katie Cunliffe and Henrietta Bannerman.

Gypsy Mixture / Nigredo DVD is available from The Place.
www.theplace.org.uk/shop

For more information about Essential Alston workshops and resources, please contact Katherine Rothman on 020 7121 1033 or email katherine.rothman@theplace.org.uk

www.theplace.org.uk