



Introduction

One of the things that students can find difficult in dance composition is structuring. This guide provides a ready-made framework for choreography and is designed to assist those studying dance at GCSE and A level.

The guide, which acts as a companion to the DVD *Alston in Overdrive*, provides a step-by-step approach to choreography that builds on the successful completion of each task. It contains detailed lesson plans and extension tasks, worksheets and assessment sheets.

Using this guide

In order to get the most out of this guide you will ideally have booked an Overdrive Workshop for your students. As part of this workshop students are taught a section of repertoire and are directed through the first task in this booklet.

Alternatively, you can use the 'starting points' section on page 17 to develop original material with students from which they can then follow the guide to produce their own work.

Core Content

Individual lesson plans have been compiled based on a two hour session. They each contain a task with several extension tasks for development and to allow for differentiation within the group. These extension tasks do not need to be completed in any order and you can just select one of them if you feel that's more appropriate, you don't need to do all of them.

This guide is intended only as a compliment to the study of dance composition and does not by any means set out to cover all aspects of it.

Lesson One

Aim: To create a solo phrase.

Activity: Students will be taught the opening unison duet from *Overdrive*. Using this material, students will create a solo.

Learning Outcome/s: Through learning repertoire students can improve their technique and performance quality in addition to increasing their movement vocabulary.

Students will understand how to fragment and re-order a phrase and appreciate the importance and effectiveness of varying direction.

Students will understand how to accent a particular movement, change the level and adapt the quality of the movement through finding moments of suspension.

Warm - Up

Using a combination of Cunningham and Release techniques try to introduce some of the material from the repertoire into the warm-up. Try to include curves, tilts, twists of the torso and a travel phrase incorporating suspension, fall and recovery.

Repertoire

The opening section of *Overdrive* begins with two male dancers entering the space and performing a duet in unison. The first half of this duet will have been taught as part of your *Overdrive* Workshop and been broken down into four clear sections each consisting of nine counts.

Resource: [Studio Footage - Section One](#)



Link to DVD

Theatre Footage – Section One

Watch the opening unison duet and discuss the relationship between the dancers, their focus, the dynamics, and the frequent changes of direction.

Creating a solo phrase



- Select 8 key / favourite movements from the opening unison duet to create your own phrase.
- Using the 8 room facings displayed on the left, create 4 changes of direction in your phrase.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Six

View the clip of Richard Alston discussing 3-dimensional movement in space.

Extension Tasks

- Find an accent within the solo phrase.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Ten

View the example of accenting movement.

- Find 2 moments of stillness / suspension.
- Change the level of the phrase transferring the material to the floor.
- Select which material works well on the floor and which is better standing. Create a phrase that travels between low and middle level.

Assessing Student Learning

- Film students performing the opening unison section from Overdrive in pairs and complete **Assessment Sheet 1**.
- In small groups perform the solo phrases. Film these phrases and discuss as a whole group the effectiveness of fragmenting, re-ordering and changing the direction of the original material.
- Students to complete **Worksheet 1** for homework.

Lesson Two & Three

Aim: To create a duet.

Activity: Students will develop their solo material to create a duet.

Learning Outcome/s: Students will develop an understanding of partner work and explore contact, unison and 'question and answer', as well as other relationships.

Warm - Up

Repeat the same technique class as Lesson One, highlighting specific areas for students to focus on.

Repertoire

Rehearse the original repertoire from *Overdrive*, refining movements and improving the performance quality.

Re-cap the solo phrase.

Resource: Studio Footage – Section One
Video footage of solos from Lesson One.

Creating a duet

- Perform your solo phrase next to your partners and see where they naturally travel.
- Try to then manipulate the phrases to 'swirl' around one another constantly changing the person in front.
- Find moments where contact is possible and consider the following ideas:
 - initiating your partners next movement
 - supporting your partner in a balance
 - creating moments of give and take
- Include moments of stillness; make decisions on where the focus is (what is the relationship to your partner?). Imagine the duets swirling around a central axis.
- Once the duets are created watch each others' duets from all corners of the room to see whether they are 3-dimensional.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Two/Section Eleven

Observe the duets between Sonja and Jonathan and Maria and Omar. Discuss moments where they initiate their partner's movement, support them in a balance, swirl around one another and highlight moments of give and take.

Extension Tasks

- Find 2 moments in the duet to dance in unison
- Teach the duet to another pair or two to create two or three unison duets
- Perform these duets on different facings



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Twelve

Observe the three unison duets performed on different facings. Comment on the 3-dimensional aspect and discuss how the material has been created to enhance this effect.

- Create 4 static positions from the solo creating two at middle level, two at low level.
- Travel them from one corner of the room to another in 'conversation' with your partner. As one is at middle level, the other is at low level. Reinforce different facings.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Eight

Observe the duet between Martin and Francesca. Comment on the 'conversation' that takes place between the dancers.

- At any point one of the dancers can walk/run in the space to return and continue the conversation. Experiment with returning to the start of the conversation, or repeating moments in the conversation.
- The conversations could accumulate with dancers joining from different sides of the room travelling across the space past one another in diagonal lines with these static/suspended moments into falling/running moments.

Assessing Student Learning

- Observe each others work and decide as a group the most effective way for these 'conversations' to occur. For example, is it more effective to keep the material as a duet or does it work for several dancers to enter the space at varying times and from different directions?
- Ask students to comment on other relationships, for example, leading/following, copying/mirroring, unison/canon.

Lesson Four & Five

Aim: To create a trio.

Activity: In groups of four, one student will choreograph the other three, using the original material from the repertoire.

Learning Outcome/s: Through discussion and homework students will understand the various types of canon and through the practical task they will recognise alternative ways of developing material for a group.

Students will also experience choreographing on others, or being directed in choreography by their peers.

Warm - Up

Develop and lengthen exercises from Lesson One. Use different room facings to encourage students to explore this element in their choreography.

Repertoire

Re-cap the original repertoire from *Overdrive*, refining movements and improving the performance quality.

Re-cap the solo phrase and the duets.

Resource: Studio Footage – Section One
Video footage of solo's from Lesson One.

Creating a trio

- In groups of four, select one person to choreograph the other three.
- Using the original material from the repertoire (divided into four sections) the choreographer gives each dancer an order in which they must perform the phrase.

Example

Dancer A performs the material starting with Section 2 then performs Section 4, 1 and Section 3.

Dancer B – 4, 1, 3, 2 and so on.

- The choreographer then decides which side each dancer enters from and at what point in the dance.
- The dancers need to be encouraged, by the choreographer, to weave in and out of each other in the space.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Three / Five

Observe Martin's solo (Section Three) followed by the grey women trio (Section Five). Comment on how the material is performed in a different order by each of the women and the effectiveness of the different facings.

Highlight the use of space between the dancers and discuss their movement weaving in and around one another.

Extension Tasks

- Find moments of stillness, suspension and accents.
- Introduce dancers into the space at different times.
- Watch the material created from different corners of the room.

Assessing Student Learning

- Observe each others' work. Discuss the effectiveness of performing the material in a random order.
- Discuss the various forms of canon.
- Ask a group of students to volunteer to perform the original material in a:
Reverting – Overlapping Canon
Simultaneous Canon
Cumulative Canon
- Discussion – Which is the most effective? Discuss the performance of the material in the various types of canon and in a random order.
- Students to complete **Worksheet 2** for homework.

Lesson Six

Aim: To create a sextet.

Activity: Two trios join and combine material to create a sextet.

Learning Outcome/s: Through a series of practical tasks students will increase their understanding of relationships, pathways and the impact of dynamics and will explore the devices of unison, canon and counterpoint.

Warm - Up

Repeat the developed exercises from Lesson Four & Five.

Repertoire

Re-cap the repertoire from *Overdrive*. Continue to refine movements and improve the performance quality.

Re-cap the solo phrase, duets and trios.

Resource: [Studio Footage – Section One](#)
Video footage of solos from Lesson One.

Creating a Sextet

- The choreographer of each trio decides which of the three phrases could be performed by the trio in unison.
- As a group they then add three or four 'explosive moments'



Link to DVD

[Studio Footage – Section Thirteen](#)

Observe the explosive moments in Martin's solo.

- Join two groups together creating a sextet with two choreographers and two phrases of material.
- The two choreographers need to find three different ways for the two groups to pass by / through one another.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Ten, Fourteen and Fifteen

Observe examples of:

- dancers as ‘human corridors’
- diagonal lines passing through one another
- dancers weaving in and around each other

Extension Tasks

- Create different speeds between the two groups



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Ten

Comment on the contrast in dynamics between the men and the red women trio in this section.

- Include moments of unison, canon and counterpoint between the two groups.

Assessing Student Learning

- Groups to perform the Sextets. Others to observe how effectively they have employed the devices of unison, canon and counterpoint. In addition, discuss pathways chosen and use of space and group formations.

Further Lessons

In completing Lessons One to Six, students will have created a solo, duet, trio and sextet and they can now start to structure and shape this material to create a final piece for performance.

In deciding the order of the material students should consider an appropriate beginning and end to the piece and ensure that there is a natural progression from start to finish. Students will also need to link the sections together allowing one to smoothly flow into another.

A timescale for completing the piece has not been suggested here as it will differ for each group depending on their previous experience and ability.

It is recommended that a lesson is set aside for students to watch the work as a whole and to complete the final assessment tasks.

The final piece should be performed, where possible, in front of an audience to develop students' confidence.



Link to DVD

Studio Footage – Section Four

View the clip of Richard Alston discussing a 'dovetail' join. Discuss other possible transitions between sections and entrances and exits.

Theatre Footage of Overdrive

Watch the full performance of Overdrive and discuss the overall structure of the work commenting on the relationship of the dance to the music.

Students to observe and comment on the following:

- transitions between sections
- highlights
- logical sequence and proportion
- contrast
- unity
- balance
- climax
- Relationship between the movement components, the aural and the visual setting.

Assessing Student Learning

- Ask students to get into small groups to complete **Worksheet 3** and feed comments back to the whole group. Use the list above to give them some starting points.
- Complete **Worksheet 4** for homework.
- Observe and discuss each other's final pieces.



Into Overdrive

Worksheet 1

1. Please explain the term **fragmentation** and provide a specific movement example to support your answer.

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2. In the DVD you were shown an example of how to **accent** a movement. Please describe the term and consider why it is important to accent particular movements in choreography.

.....

.....

.....

3. One of the key characteristics of Richard Alston's choreography is his multi-directional movement. Using the grid below please state the directions you selected for Task One – Creating your solo.

AUDIENCE

| | | |
|------------|------------|------------|
| DSL | DSC | DSR |
| CSL | CS | CSR |
| USL | USC | USR |

.....

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DSL – Down stage left
CSL – Centre stage left
USL – Up stage left

DSC – Down stage centre
CS – Centre stage
USC – Up stage centre

DSR – Down stage right
CSR – Centre stage right
USR – Upstage right



Into Overdrive

Worksheet 2

1. Below is a list of some of the relationships that can be formed either in a duet or in a group.

Please fill in the missing words:

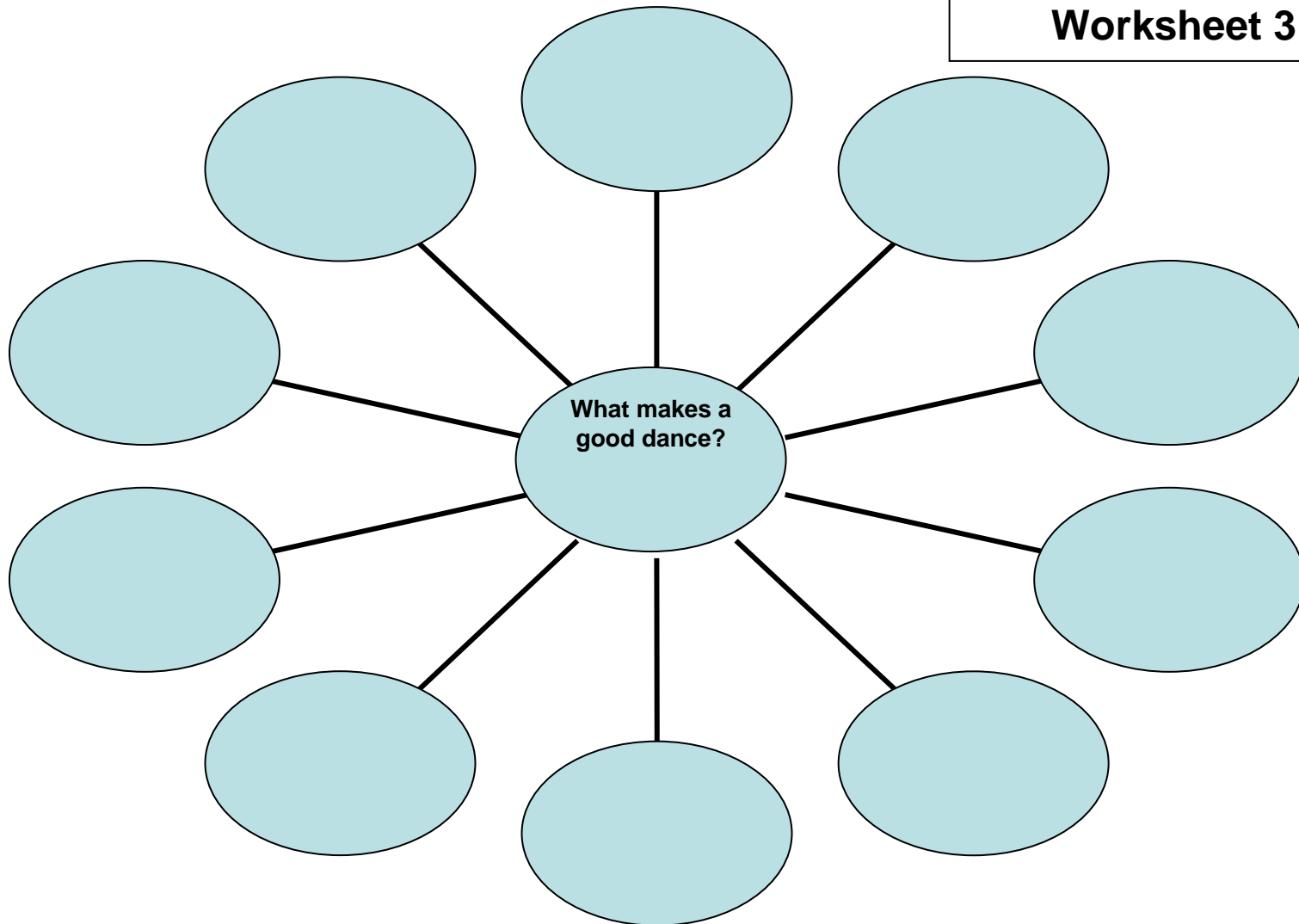
Question and Unison and

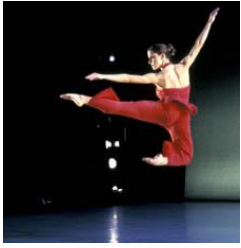
..... and Following and Mirroring

2. Please complete the chart below:

| Types of Canon | Explanation of term | Example |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Reverting overlapping | In a reverting canon the whole phrase is performed but dancers start at different times and overlap the last dancer. | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 |
| Reverting non-overlapping | | |
| Simultaneous | | |
| Cumulative | | |
| Loose | | |

Worksheet 3





Into Overdrive

Worksheet 4

Factual



1. Please name the choreographer of *Overdrive* & the Company performing the work.
2. What is the year that this work first premiered?
3. Please name the composer of the music.
4. Please name the set, lighting and costume designer.

Describe



5. Describe the key aspects of the movement components (action, space, dynamic, relationship).
6. Describe the visual setting (set design, costume and lighting).
7. Describe the aural elements.
8. Describe the dancers E.g. number, role, gender.

Analyse



9. How do the lighting, costume and set design support the theme/intention of the dance?
10. How has the choreographer used the accompaniment? E.g. Direct Correlation, Mutual Co-existence, Music Visualisation etc.
11. Identify key elements of the movement components. Is there anything distinctive about the arrangements of groups of dancers in the performance space?

Interpret & Evaluate



12. Consider all the things that you have noted down above. Please answer the following:
 - How well do you think everything fits together to communicate the intention of the dance? (Comment on the relationship between the movement components, visual and aural setting).
 - What works and why? What is less successful and why?
 - How does the dance make you feel? Do you like it and if so why? If not, why not? Draw on elements of the work to support your answers.



Into Overdrive

Assessment Sheet 1

Teacher

Student

| Physical Skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Posture/Alignment | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Extension, flexion, rotation | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Whole body participation | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ability to isolate body parts | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Reproduce movement accurately | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Balance | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Elevation | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Stamina | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Flexibility | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Co-ordination | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Application of dynamic range | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Interpretative Skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Projection | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Use of emphasis | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Musicality | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Focus | | | | | | | | | | | |

1 – Needs improvement 2 – Satisfactory 3 – Good 4 – Very good 5 – Excellent

Starting Points

To begin the process of choreography an initial idea or starting point is needed. Whilst Alston's starting point is always movement and its relationship to the music he is also stimulated by the world around him and aspects from the visual arts, literature and architecture eventually find their way into the matrix of his pieces.

Listed below are a few starting points for dance composition whose work Alston has commented on as being inspirational.

Oskar Fischinger

Tasks

- Research in-depth the work of Oskar Fischinger.



Link to DVD

Interview with Richard Alston – Art

Watch the section on Art on the DVD with comments by Alston on the work of Oskar Fischinger.

- Select one of Fischinger's paintings as a stimulus.
- Explore initial movement ideas from the geometric shapes, colours, pathways and the dynamic qualities displayed in the paintings. Look particularly at the 3-dimensional aspect of his work, the depth created and his use of space.
- From these initial movement ideas create a motif.

Resources

Websites

www.oskarfischinger.org/

www.artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles1998/Articles0498/OFischingerA.html

<http://www.tobeycmossgallery.com/fischingerchro.html>

Books

Moritz, William; *Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger*, Indiana University Press 2004

Video

The Contemplative Films of Oskar Fischinger available to order online
www.oskarfischinger.org

Naum Gabo

Tasks

- Find images of the Revolving Torsion Fountain (1972) which is situated outside St Thomas's Hospital in London.



Link to DVD

Interview with Richard Alston – Art

Listen to Richard Alston discussing the fountain and how it inspired movement ideas.

- Experiment with using different parts of the body to reflect the 'figure of eight' outline created by the fountain.
- Devise a motif combining both air and floor patterns to 'cut through the space' and to reflect the circular motion of the water.
- Develop this motif by changing the dynamics, highlighting the different qualities of the water and the metal structure.

Resources

Websites

www.tate.org.uk

www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/gabo_naum.html

www.southbanklondon.com/walk_this_way/public_art_new.htm

Books

Hammer, Martin and Lodder, Christine; *Constructing Modernity: The Art and Career of Naum Gabo*, New Haven 2000

Johannes Vermeer

Tasks

- Watch the section on *Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms* from the video - Essential Alston.
- Select and research a painting by Vermeer.

- Explore movement ideas based on the painting examining the areas of focus, the subject matter, the social context and the emotion of the painting.
- Try to also explore the character portrayed and imagine what their previous/following movements may have been.
- Select and refine these movement ideas to create a motif.

Resources

Websites

www.about-vermeer-art.com

www.essentialvermeer.20m.com

www.nga.gov/feature/vermeer

Books

Wheelock, Arthur. K; *Vermeer*, Harry N Abrams, 1997

Snow, Edward. A; *A Study of Vermeer*, University of California Press, 1994

Steadman, Philip; *Vermeers Camera: Uncovering the truth behind the Masterpieces*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

'Marine' - Poem by Rimbaud

*Chariots of silver and of copper
 Prows of steel and silver
 Beat the foam,
 Lift the stems of the brambles.
 The streams of barren parts
 And the immense tracks of the ebb
 Flow circularly towards the east,
 Towards the pillars of the forest,
 Towards the pillars of the jetty,
 Against whose angles are hurled whirlpools of light.*

Tasks

- Watch the section discussing *Rumours, Visions* from the video Essential Alston.
- Research the work of Rimbaud to place the poem in context. Select action words from the poem and explore the dynamic qualities. Think about the use of repetition and the sound of the words. Consider the emotions and atmosphere that the poem evokes.
- Select and refine these movement ideas to create a motif.

Resources

Website

<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~os0tmc/rimbaud/rimbmain.htm>

Books

W.M. Frohock, *Rimbaud's Poetic Practice: Image and Theme in the Major Poems*, Harvard University Press, 1963

C.A. Hackett, *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 1981

R. Little, *Rimbaud: Illuminations*, Grant & Cutler, 1983

K. Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, Macmillan, 1988

E. Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud*, Faber and Faber, 1973

From these starting points students can manipulate and expand their material, exploring ideas from the list below, to create a phrase that can be developed using the step-by-step guide.

Suggestions for manipulating and developing a motif

- Change the size of the movement
- Change the direction, facing, level or plane
- Perform the motif backwards
- Repeat all or part of the motif
- Fragment the motif, using only parts of it, or re-order the motif
- Add or incorporate movements into the motif
- Perform the motif using a different body part
- Change the tempo, quality and force
- Change the rhythm
- Combine any of the above

Artistic Director: Richard Alston



- 1948 – Born in Stoughton, Sussex, educated at Eton
- 1965 – Studies fine arts and theatre design at Croydon College of Art
- 1967 – Joins London Contemporary Dance School
- 1968 – Creates first work *Transit* which included Siobhan Davies
- 1972 – Forms Strider, the first independent dance group to be officially recognised by funding bodies in Britain
- 1973 – Strider visits Dartington College of Arts – Alston meets Mary Fulkerson and is introduced to contact and release techniques
- 1975 – Strider cease performing and Alston moves to New York to study with Cunningham
- 1977 – Returns to London and begins to teach Cunningham Technique
- 1978 – Richard Alston and Dancers is formed
- 1980 – Choreographs first work for Ballet Rambert, *Bell High*. In the same year he is invited to become Resident Choreographer for the company
- 1982 – Second Stride is formed with Ian Spink and Siobhan Davies
- 1986 – Becomes Artistic Director of Ballet Rambert
- 1987 – Ballet Rambert becomes Rambert Dance Company to reflect the change in the Company's style
- 1992 – Made an Honorary Doctor of Music at Surrey University
- Parts with Rambert Dance Company
- 1993 – Creates work for various companies including Shobhana Jeyasingh and LCDT
- 1994 – Becomes Artistic Director of the Contemporary Dance Trust
- Forms Richard Alston Dance Company
- 1995 – Named a Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres for his work as a teacher and choreographer in France.
- 2001 – Awarded CBE in the New Years Honours list
- 2006 – Richard Alston remains as Artistic Director of the Contemporary Dance Trust and Richard Alston Dance Company

- 2008 – Commissioned by Dance Umbrella and Sadler’s Wells to create a special programme to mark his 60th birthday and 40 years of choreography
- 2009 - Awarded the De Valois Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance at the Critic’s Circle National Dance Awards 2008
 - Richard Alston is announced the New Chair of Youth Dance England



Richard Alston Dance Company

A Short History

Richard Alston was one of the original students at the London Contemporary Dance School, choreographing his first work there in 1968. He went on to choreograph for London Contemporary Dance Theatre, before forming this country's first independent dance company, Strider, in 1972. In 1975, he left for New York to study, principally with Merce Cunningham. On his return, two years later, he worked as an independent dance maker and teacher throughout Europe. During this period, he created *Rainbow Bandit* for LCDT (1977) and *Doublework* (1978) with his own dancers, for the first Dance Umbrella festival. Teaching remains a highly important aspect of Alston's work.

1980 saw Alston appointed as Resident Choreographer with Ballet Rambert, and two years later he co-founded Second Stride with Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink. He assumed the Artistic Directorship of Rambert Dance Company in 1986, a post he held until 1992. During these twelve years he created twenty-five works for Rambert, in addition to commissioned works for the Royal Danish Ballet (1982) and the Royal Ballet (1983). He also made *Soda Lake* (1981) and *Dutiful Ducks* (1982), two solo works for Michael Clark.

In 1992 he created *Le Marteau Sans Maitre* for the Compagnie Chopinot in France, combining it with a revival of *Rainbow Bandit* to form an evening of his own work. With the creation of another full evening in 1994 for LCDT at the Aldeburgh Festival, it was a logical step for Alston to form his own company – this he was invited to do by the Contemporary Dance Trust, when he took up the post of Artistic Director of the Trust in Autumn 1994.

The Richard Alston Dance Company was launched in November 1994 to wide critical acclaim. The works Alston has created for the company include *Movements from Petrushka* (1994), *Beyond Measure* (1996), *Light Flooding Into Darkened Rooms* (1997), *The Signal of a Shake* (2000), *Strange Company* (2001) and *Stampede* (2002). A major television documentary about the creation of *Sometimes I Wonder* (1995), directed by Mark Kidell, was shown on Channel 4 in December 1996.

In 1992, Alston was made an Honorary Doctor of Music at Surrey University. In 1995, he was named a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres for his work as a teacher and choreographer in France. A joint venture between the Richard Alston Dance Company and the London Sinfonietta in May 1996 formed the climax to composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle's retrospective at the South Bank Centre, London, in which *Secret Theatre*, *Orpheus Singing and Dreaming*, and *Bach Measures* (later retitled *Beyond Measure*), were performed.

In October 1998, Alston celebrated his 50th birthday and 30 years of choreography with a gala evening at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the South Bank Centre. Included in his retrospective was *Sophisticated Curiosities*, a medley of extracts from past works, dating from 1970 to 1990.

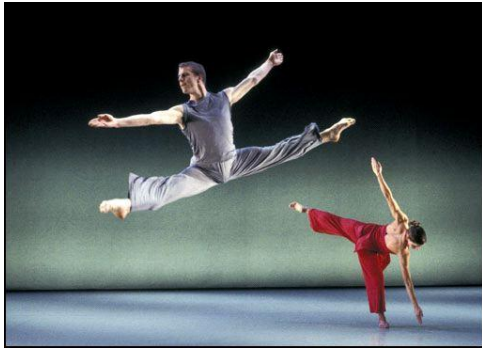
The Place – the home of the Richard Alston Dance Company - has recently undergone a major redevelopment programme, having been awarded a £1.8 million grant from the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England. RADC moved to temporary studios and offices during the rebuilding, and returned to The Place in Spring 2001, where they now occupy brand new offices and the Robert Cohan Studio. In January 2001 Alston was awarded the CBE in the New Year Honours list. In October 2001, the Company performed at the royal reopening of the Robin Howard Dance Theatre at The Place, where *Water Music*, a special celebratory piece, was premiered.

Richard Alston Dance Company performed at British Dance Edition in Birmingham, in the Spring of 2002 and in Autumn 2003 performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in celebration of 25 years of Dance Umbrella during the same year Alston received an honorary MA from University College Chichester.

In 2004 the Spring tour ended with a New York debut in May at the Joyce Theater in New York celebrating the Company's tenth year. In 2006 the Company embarked on a tour of the USA.

In 2008, to mark his 60th birthday and 40 years of choreography, Richard Alston was commissioned by Dance Umbrella and Sadler's Wells to create a special programme which included the world premier of *Blow Over* set to Philip Glass's *Songs From Liquid Days*, and the London premier of *Shuffle It Right*, inspired by the idiosyncratic and jazzy songs of Hoagy Carmichael.

In 2009, Richard Alston was awarded the De Valois Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance at the Critic's Choice National Dance Awards. He was also announced the New Chair of Youth Dance England. Following the success of their last USA tour, the Company will embark on two further visits to America during 2009 and 2010.



Overdrive

Choreography Richard Alston

Music Terry Riley Keyboard Study #1

Lighting Charles Balfour

Costumes Jeanne Spaziani

Running time approximately 21 minutes

Cast: 11 dancers

Overdrive was first performed by Richard Alston Dance Company at the Derngate Theatre in Northampton on 3rd October 2003. It was filmed with the original cast by Richard Coldman at The Place in 2004.

Richard Alston discusses *Overdrive*

“When I began choreographing, the first extended piece that I did was called *Nowhere Slowly* in 1970. I don’t know whether it was that year or the year before, but I actually heard the piece of music that I’m using now [Terry Riley’s *Keyboard Studies*] in the Proms. It was played by two harpsichordists – it’s actually just written for two keyboard players. It was amplified and it did sound fantastic in the Albert Hall. I worked with Terry Riley on another piece of his, for *Nowhere Slowly*; so in a funny sort of way it’s going all the way back to the beginning.

This recording is very new. He’s a really interesting German pianist [Steffan Schleiermacher] who specialises in 20th century music – and 21st, I imagine, now. He, for instance, recorded all the prepared piano pieces by Cage, that’s how I first came across him and that’s why I think I picked this CD up in a record shop. The energy of the music is very, very exciting, but it’s actually very difficult to deal with, because it contains such short little phrases. And they get shorter and shorter, and then after 21 minutes the music just suddenly stops.

The thing that’s interesting – but also exasperating and difficult – is that the whole piece is about two instrumental voices, and about small fragments of melody and how they interact. On the sleeve notes for this CD the pianist and the computer operator are seen with a large bottle of red wine and he says in the sleeve notes that they spent night after night having takeaway pizza, red wine, and watching Bond movies. My point is, and their point is, that the computer did it all. They had to be there to supervise but actually the way these voices were put together is all done by the computer. So the computer has no sense of human breath, it keeps shifting, and just when you think there’s a little tune, it goes all over the place, and then it’s gone, it’s shifting all the time. You have to find the pulse.

The challenge that I have is to not be a slave to the music, because it would become number crazy and intellectual and not very exciting. So I'm trying to let the dancers move in a way which feels like the buzz you get out of the texture of the music. This morning was the first time I'd seen all of the sections from Overdrive together, and I quite liked it, quite liked the feel of it. It's not finished yet, so it could all go pear-shaped, but at the moment it's doing what I want, which is to try and reflect some of the complexity of the music, and at the same time give that euphoric atmosphere to the piece.

To me what's interesting is that I've seen choreographers use, for instance, Steve Reich, in a way which is kind of euphoric and I've seen other people like Lucinda [Childs] use Philip Glass or Steve Reich in a way that's very, very rigorous. I seek the middle path! I'd really like it to have something that is rigorous, but at the same time I want it to be exciting. The thing I'm trying to hold on to – and so far, it's feeling like it's working – is that I should never get so bogged down that I lose the sense of excitement in the music. So there've been one or two times when I've started some group movement, which then felt a bit static, so I've just chucked it out. For example, there was a piece for 11 dancers; and I thought this is absurd, they can't move – so I changed it to 6. It should have this sense of moving. Underneath all this texture, when you listen to the music, very often you'll hear there's an absolutely simple descending scale. It happens again and again and very often that's what we're listening to – there are so many layers, as it gets more and more complex. What we can hear is actually 'see how they run' [from the nursery rhyme Three Blind Mice].

I started making the piece by everyone learning the opening section – all the dancers know that. That's how we started; we made some material, in the summer. I think there are two things guiding the movement. Firstly trying to make sure that the movement is relaxed because, actually, if you go with the fastest pace of the music it's so fast that the movement's got to be relaxed or it'd just turn into a complete tense battle. So it has to have all that energy, but to really move fast, you have to stay very relaxed. I'm always trying to find movement that you can do, in a way, that's slightly laid back so that you really stay with the rhythm. I think particularly with the duets and the solo material, I'm trying to syncopate a lot, in a pretty instinctive sort of way.

Secondly, I'm trying to make movement so that they can actually move in the space – rather than it being on one spot. So that actually, spatially, the structures are very simple, nothing very complicated. Quite a lot of material seems to have divided into men doing one thing, and women doing another. There's nothing significant about that, it just happened. But there are six women and I have divided them into three and three. So then when they dance with men they dance with the same three men, and that leaves Luke and Jonathan who either dance together or solo. It's not really as rigid as that, but that's the kind of cast structure, if you like, a sextet with three women, a sextet with another three women and the same three men, and then two men.

There's going to be a moment when it all, suddenly, goes down, quite near the end, gets thinner and thinner, right down to the bass part. And rather than having a slow section in the piece, my idea was – and it may not work, is that everyone should be on stage and just be still. It should be like a big breath, big rest for both the audience and the dancers, and the music feels like it's fading away. And then there's the final burst. But the notion of building up to a conventional climax just really doesn't work because it really just stops; the music just suddenly stops, on a two. One – two- three- four- five- six – seven – eight-

nine –one – two – then it stops. So it doesn't have the sense of completion as for example the Steve Reich music in *Roughcut*.

I sort of think of *Overdrive* as *Roughcut* Mark 2 you see, it's quite similar to *Roughcut* in several ways, but I think it's tougher, and grittier, and that's what I like about it."

16th September 2003

Richard Alston

In Conversation with Lucy Muggleton

LM: You have been quoted as saying that in creating work you are "stimulated by the people you make the piece for". Could you describe how you create work with your dancers?

RA: I choose them quite carefully for each piece that I make. I can't give you necessarily a logical explanation I just know.

In creating work with the dancers I just get in the room with them and try things. With Martin, for example, things move very quickly because we've worked together a lot and I find him a huge inspiration because he's so musical and elegant. I've realised that one of things that I love about Martin's dancing is he's very fluid and he does things which are inventive and I can see very quickly where to take them.

LM: What do you look for when selecting your dancers?

RA: Mostly some kind of energy. I think very often what attracts me to a dancer is if they've got a very strong energy of some kind, or a particular quality. There are different kinds of dancers that I find inspiring in different ways. The dancers have also got to be musical.

LM: What process do the dancers go through for an audition?

RA: They take class with the Company, and then will learn sections from the repertoire. It's been a couple of years since I held a formal audition which are quite long and can be over several days. Once I shortlist I ask those selected to work with the Company and see how they get on and fit in, once they've met the dancers.

LM: It's been well documented that music is a source of inspiration for your work and you've described how your dancers also inspire you. What else inspires your work?

RA: I know it sounds odd but just movement really inspires me. I love dancers and I love music but I also love dance. It's an extraordinary process when you're making dance, guessing what might happen next. The concern with movement itself is a huge inspiration and that's why I still do it. I love dance. It was hugely inspiring last night to see Trisha's (Brown) new piece. One of the reasons why I love Trisha's work is, I love the fact that she makes corners all of the time, there's all these angles.

Certainly using space is an inspiration for me, and so space is sometimes something I get excited about. I also get excited about buildings, but I can't pretend that I stand there and think that I'm going to put this in my new piece. I just get excited about things, just like you'd go and see a really good movie and really enjoy it. I don't necessarily put it into a piece of work.

What interests me is to keep on trying again with a new piece of music. So it's music and dance, that's quite enough for me, then anything else becomes part of that process. For

example, when I did *Fever*, I don't want to sound pretentious but, the dancers and I spoke a lot and I showed them pictures of some of the minor figures around the edge of the Sistine Chapel. The fact that Michelangelo showed all these people twisting and touching and writhing ... there was all this sort of energy and sexuality. But I wouldn't say that the piece is about the Sistine Chapel, or inspired by the Sistine Chapel really.

In *Essential Alston* I mention the sculpture by Henry Moore that I love, his interlocking piece. I went back a few months ago to see it and it was a fantastically sunny day so the sculpture was gleaming in all the light. I didn't stand there and think how could this inspire me for dance. I just know when I feel happy about a piece of work and I drink it in and just allow myself to be stimulated, or excited, or whatever it is I feel about the work. I digest inspiration. I know that the kind of interlocking and folding and extraordinary three-dimensional richness of that sculpture by Henry Moore is part and parcel of the way that I often think of duets, but I don't make a duet about it.

LM: You have said in interviews that you don't see yourself as an abstract artist and that you would describe yourself more as a formalist. Could you explain this?

RA: Yes, I don't see myself as an abstract artist. I love structure, and on stage I would say I'm quite architectural. I love architecture and rhythmic patterns in space, sharp exciting, clean angles and repetitive rhythmic patterns in space. The way I work is quite architectural, I really like that, the way you're carving into space. In that sense it's very sculptural, like carving, you're making marks. All of this is the sort of 'stuff' of dance but actually the life of it, for me, is the relationship with the music, and fundamentally, dance is a human activity and I think I'm much too humane to be an abstract artist. I think if I was an abstract artist people would think I was a bit dodgy, I'm not very pure. When I look at Trisha's (Brown) work it's very pure and intellectually very clear. I don't have that kind of rigour and I accept that.

I have a very strong sense of structure and I try to subvert that by making things lively. I'm not interested in something which is like a lecture demonstration of structure. I always try to set something up but then not stick to it and make mistakes. I love the idea that in all Islamic carpets there has to be a mistake, to show that they are not Allah, and that a human being must not attempt perfection. I also love looking at Folk Art as it has all these funny little imperfections, and that's human. To me dance is basically an activity about humans, it tells you something about human beings and the state of being alive, at least that's what it says to me. I love things that tumble and just sort of half happen and I'm quite interested in just how expressive dance can be without adding anything to it, without actually putting faces on, or mime. In that sense I think I probably have been described as a formalist. I am interested in form, I love structure, it's a fantastic human invention, the fact that we actually make structures in buildings or in music - the need for order is a very strong human craving.

LM: You have recently been described as 'a founding father of British contemporary dance, but with choreography as fresh and exciting as a new kid on the block'. With over 30 years of working in the dance world how do you keep your work fresh and exciting?

RA: That's really hard to answer because if there was a formula it wouldn't be fresh and exciting. I guess the answer is that I take risks. I'm always trying to do something new for me. In the ten years that I've had this Company, that has in a way been quite easy. There's a whole catalogue of music that I would like to apply what I know about dance, to

Chopin, to Ravel, to Bach. So what I try to do is to not do what I've done before. When I'm in the studio I think, I can't give the same steps to these people.

LM: But that must be so difficult, to be constantly searching for a new vocabulary?

RA: Well I don't think I do that, I don't really try and do that. Sometimes each piece of music seems to evoke a certain kind of movement language. Sometimes I see things that I like and I think oh that's quite similar to such and such but different, and I think that's interesting that that's turned up again because it's clearly something in movement that I really like. I suppose the only truthful answer is that I go into the studio and I look at the dancer either like Martin who has been there for ten years and we work together to try and do something new, or I've got a new dancer, who I haven't worked with before, and that's an instant stimulation. So if it feels fresh and exciting in the studio, there's a chance that might be reflected on stage.

LM: During an interview in 1986 you said that your work "is all to do with falling". To what extent is this true of your work today?

RA: I think I would slightly adjust that and say that it's to do with flowing. It's true I've always liked things being off centre but interestingly enough I think one of the ways the Company has grown technically and I think one of the reasons I was keen on falling was, well I like it. I love being off balance and it taking you somewhere else. Also it seemed to me, to be a very clear way of getting away from Merce (Cunningham), because Cunningham has to be from moment to moment. It has to be movement that's discovered in such a way that you can do anything, at any time. So his movement's not at all about falling, it's not at all about flowing, it's about going from movement to movement and connecting movements, sometimes quite awkwardly. I'm interested in phrases, I love small connecting steps, all the stuff that goes back to ballet which I'm perfectly happy to do. I love flowing movement and what I'm trying to say is, that in the past few years in trying to work on the Company's technique, which I'm really interested in doing, and the connection between teaching and choreography to me, keeps going full circle. It probably feels less than it used to because I'm really keen now on finding that balance between fluidity and clarity.

LM: The Company has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. Have you got to where you wanted to with it? Where do you see the Company in 2014?

RA: That's a very hard one to answer. It made me think about all the lovely dancers I've worked with, and there have been some really lovely dancers in this Company. I really like this present Company and we've been together, or the majority have been together for several seasons and I'm thrilled that we're going out to America. So when I think about those things I'm very happy with the state it's in.

Where do I see the Company in 2014! How old am I going to be then! Blimey! Gosh I don't know. I'm not very strategic. I'm not a very strategic person. I think there's going to be a time, I've just started to think this recently, there's going to be a time when I wake up suddenly one morning and think I've really done this enough, and then I'm going to be a writer. It may well be a fantasy but I love words, and I love writing, and I don't ever want to not be a creative artist, I need that. But if I can't do this as well as I think I should, you know if I just get too old and sore or something, then I don't know. It's a very flimsy world out there and you never know when you're going to be put on the dump quite honestly.

LM: Does that scare you or do you look forward to doing something different?

RA: What I'm scared of, is we've had some really lovely feedback and support about the weekend we did for Bob (Robert) Cohan and the truth is that I'm very scared probably quite justifiably, of not knowing quite what to do if my work disappears in the way that Bob's has. That's why I think I made such a huge effort, to treat him as I would like to be treated. So I do get scared when I think about the work, and the politics of the world of theatre, and the fact that work can just disappear. The most straightforward support that I get is from audiences and that's wonderful. I love the fact that people seem to have a really good time.

Recommended Reading List



The following articles, books, and video resources are recommended to students of Alston's work. Those titles marked with an asterisk are particularly recommended by *Essential Alston*, the education programme of Richard Alston Dance Company. Please note that, unless otherwise specified, these resources are not available to purchase from The Place – if you are interested in buying copies of any titles listed below, we advise contacting the dance resource specialist Dance Books, on 01420 86138.

Videoworks at The Place keep a range of Alston pieces, and documentaries, on video in their reference library. To request a library catalogue, or to arrange a video viewing, please contact Videoworks Administrator, on **020 7121 1060**, or email oiane.munain@theplace.org.uk.

If you have any questions about the *Essential Alston* programme, contact Katie Fish, Learning and Access Administrator, on **020 7121 1032** or email katie.fish@theplace.org.uk

General background information

Articles

| Author | Title | Publication |
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| Alston, Richard | <i>Passing Through Time : An Orpheus Singing</i> | Dance Theatre Journal Summer 1996 (Vol. 13 No. 1), pp. 6 – 7 |
| *Anon | <i>Movement and People First : Richard Alston talks to Dance and Dancers</i> [A good resource if studying Alston's early work] | Dance and Dancers June 1978, pp. 22 – 25 |
| Clarke, Mary | <i>Richard Alston</i> | The Dancing Times July 1978, p.583 |
| *Constanti, Sophie | <i>Richard Alston : The Humanistic Approach</i> [An interview with Alston about how he addresses gender, sex and politics in his work] | Dance Theatre Journal Autumn 1989 (Vol. 7, No. 2), pp. 14 – 16 |
| Jordan, Stephanie | <i>British Modern Dance : Early Radicalism</i> | Dance Research Autumn 1989 (Vol. 7, No.2), pp. 3 – 15 |

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| Jordan, Stephanie | <i>Interviews with Richard Alston and Nigel Osborne</i> [Discusses the working relationship between Alston and the composer] | Choreography and Dance, 1992 (Vol. 1, Pt 4), pp.57 – 72 |
| *Kane, Angela | <i>Richard Alston : Twenty-one years of Choreography</i> [Biographical chronology from 1968 1989] | Dance Research, Autumn 1989 (Vol. 7, - No.2), pp. 16 – 54 |
| Kane, Angela | <i>Shared Enthusiasms</i> | Dance and Dancers October 1991 |
| Macaulay, Alastair | <i>Aspects of Englishness</i> | Dance Theatre Journal Spring 1996 (Vol. 12, No. 4), pp. 12 – 13 |
| *Macaulay, Alastair | <i>Choreography by Richard Alston</i> [Chronology of his work from 1968 - 1974] | Dance Theatre Journal Summer 1987 (Vol. 5, No. 3 : Special Rambert Issue), pp. 32 - 34 |
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| Macaulay, Alastair | <i>Richard Alston : Back at The Place</i> | The Dancing Times Jan 1995, pp. 333 – 339 |
| Mackrell, Judith | <i>Postmodern Dance in Britain</i> | Dance Research Spring 1991 (Vol. 9, No. 1), pp. 40 - 57 |
| Parry, Jan | <i>London Contemporary Dance Theatre</i> | The Dancing Times Jan 1994, pp. 338 – 339 |

Books

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| *Bremser, Martha (ed.) | <i>Fifty Contemporary Choreographers</i> [Good reference book discussing the life and work of Alston, and many other choreographers] | Routledge, London 1999 |
| *Jordan, Stephanie | <i>Striding Out : Aspects of Contemporary and New Dance in Britain</i> | Dance Books, London 1992 |
| *Mackrell, Judith | <i>Out of Line : The Story of New Dance</i> | Dance Books, London 1992 |
| *Robertson, Allen & Hutera, Donald | <i>The Dance Handbook</i> | Longman, London 1988 |

Video / DVD

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| The Place Learning and Access | <i>Alston in Overdrive</i> DVD [Contains a full performance of <i>Overdrive</i> by Richard Alston Dance Company, a detailed breakdown of the work in the studio and interviews with Richard Alston and the composer Terry Riley. Also available is <i>Into Overdrive</i> a teachers' guide, including lesson ideas, assessment tasks and information on Richard Alston Dance Company. Both are available to buy from The Place.] | Contemporary Dance Trust, 2004 |
| The Place Learning & Access | <i>Essential Alston : A Choreographer Discusses his Work</i> [Includes extracts from RADDC pieces and interviews with Alston and his company dancers. Accompanied by a booklet including a choreochronicle of Alston's work and ideas for lesson development. Available to buy from The Place] | Contemporary Dance Trust, 1998 |
| BBC | <i>Just Dancing Around</i> [Documentary specifically about Richard Alston] | BBC |

Information on Rambert

Articles

| Author | Title | Publication |
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| Brennan, Mary | <i>Rambert's Relaunch</i> | Dance Theatre Journal Spring 1995 (Vol. 11, No.4), pp. 32 – 34 |
| *Jordan, Stephanie | <i>Alston's Rambert</i> | Dance Theatre Journal Summer 1987 (Vol. 5, No.3 – Special Rambert Issue) pp. 2 – 4 |
| *Macaulay, Alastair | <i>Rambert's Alston</i> | Dance Theatre Journal Summer 1987 (Vol. 5, No.3 – Special Rambert Issue) pp. 5 – 7 |
| Newman, Barbara | <i>Richard Alston</i> [Discussion about Pulcinella for Ballet Rambert] | The Dancing Times January 1997, pp. 315 – 317 |
| Nugent, Ann & Witherspoon, Ray Rubidge, Sarah | <i>Curtain Up</i> <i>The Rambert Reaches Sixty</i> [An interview with Richard Alston] | Dance and Dancers March 1986, pp. 5, 7 – 9 Dance Theatre Journal Summer 1986 (Vol. 4, No.2) pp. 2 – 5, 22 – 23 |

Vaughan, David *The Evolution of Ballet Rambert : Dance Magazine
from Ashton to Alston* October 1982, pp. 74 – 7

Books

*Pritchard, Jane *Rambert : A Celebration* Rambert Dance Company
(ed.) London, 1996

White, Joan *Twentieth Century Dance in* Dance Books
(ed.) *Britain* London, 1985

Video

Sussex Video *Different Steps* Sussex Video, 1985
[Contrasts the work of Ballet
Rambert's principal choreographers,
including Alston]

NRCD *Soda Lake* National Resource Centre
[Discusses origin, structure and for Dance, 1981
interpretation of this piece]

Information on Second Stride

Articles

| Author | Title | Publication |
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| Jordan, Stephanie | <i>Second Stride</i> | The Dancing Times August 1983, pp. 877, 879 |
| Vaughan, David | <i>Hitting Their Stride</i> | Dance Magazine July 1982, pp. 39 – 41 |

Books

*Jordan, Stephanie *Striding Out : Aspects of* Dance Books
Contemporary and New Dance London, 1992
In Britain

*Mackrell, Judith *Out of Line : The Story of New* Dance Books
Dance London, 1992

Video

Dance Umbrella *Dance Umbrella Compilation* Concord Video and Film
Festival [Includes extracts from Second Council, 1988
1988 Stride]

Dance Umbrella *Second Stride* Concord Video and Film
Festival [Ian Spink discusses 'Dancing and Council, 1988
1988 Shouting']

London Video *Second Stride* London Video Access
Access [Features 'Doublework' by Alston 1983
And interviews with Choreographers]