ESSENTIAL ALSTON
A CHOREOGRAPHER DISCUSSES HIS WORK
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Preface

Essential Alston aims to give dance educators and their students an insight into Richard Alston's thinking and choreographic practice. The essay by Sarah Rubidge in this book places Alston in the context of British contemporary dance and offers a succinct discussion of his approach to choreography, with specific reference to the DVD. Also included is a selected bibliography for further reading and a complete choreo-chronicle of Alston's work from 1968 to 2008.

Suggestion for Further Study by Rebecca Seymore shows how elements of the video can provide starting points for dance activity in a range of study areas including performance, composition, dance history and appreciation. We should emphasise that we do not see these discrete, or the suggestions as being exclusively focused on one area or another. We encourage teachers and students to make connections, cross-references and creative links from one area of study to another and from the choreography to other art forms. This section is designed to be used in close conjunction with the DVD, and 'suggested tasks' range from simple observation to compositional exercises and discussion topics which could be developed over a number of lessons.

We very much hope that Essential Alston will be a useful addition to existing resources for anyone teaching or studying dance. Our suggestions are offered as starting points only and we hope that users will find their own way to explore and develop the material.

Christopher Thomson
Director, Learning and Access
The Place
Background and career outline 1970-1998

Richard Alston began his career in the early 1970s as one of the leading innovators in the second wave of British modern dance. He later became artistic director of Rambert Dance Company and is now artistic director of the Richard Alston Dance Company and of The Place, London’s biggest Dance Agency and a major centre for choreography. Other innovators who were developing their work at that time were the members of the X6 collective\(^1\). (X6 was Britain's answer to Judson Church Dance Theatre, a group of experimental dance artists who worked in New York in the 1960s. Members of Judson Church Dance Theatre included choreographers Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, and artists such as Robert Rauschenburg.)

Alston, along with Siobhan Davies, was one of the first full-time students at London School of Contemporary Dance \(^2\), which opened in 1966. In common with Davies, Alston had attended a Foundation course in the Fine Arts before turning to dance as a career. His knowledge of the visual arts was later to stand him in good stead, for he recruited outstanding visual artists to design for his works during his tenure at Rambert Dance Company.

On leaving LCDS in 1972 Alston formed a dance company, Strider, the first independent dance group to be officially recognised by funding bodies in Britain. (Amongst its members was Eva Karczag, later to dance with the Trisha Brown Dance Company.) Strider was a democratic company in which all the performers choreographed works for the repertoire. The company experimented with using everyday movement as well as dance movement, and with dances which included speech and unusual music. As well as performing in theatres they performed in venues such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Serpentine Gallery in London, and the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford.

That a company such as Strider was to emerge from LCDS at that time was not surprising. The School was a hotbed of artistic research. Among those who worked at The Place were contemporary music groups such as The Fires of London (directed by two young composers now known as Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Sir Harrison Birtwistle. Alston was later to use their music for his work). A mixed media company Moving Being, renowned for its exploratory theatre work which combined ideas from dance, avant-garde theatre and performance art, was also based at The Place.

Richard Alston's work was, at the time, quite radical. Britain had only just begun to develop its own contemporary theatre dance tradition in the late 1960s. Ballet Rambert began to produce contemporary dance works in 1966, under the directorship of Norman Morrice, and the newly formed London Contemporary Dance Company (later London Contemporary Dance Theatre), presented its first season of contemporary dance in 1967, under ex-Graham dancer Robert Cohan.

Both companies were developing a style of modern dance derived from the choreographic style developed by Martha Graham. By 1971 both Alston and the founding members of the X6 collective were investigating the more radical artistic
approaches which had been developed in America in the 1960s as a challenge to the
type of modern dance made by artists such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. 
These challenges were initiated by Merce Cunningham in the late 1950s.
Cunningham was interested in dance for its own sake, rather than dance as a
narrative medium. He used chance procedures as a means of generating both the
movements and structures of his works. His approach was extended by New York's
Judson Church Dance Theatre Group in the mid-1960s. The Judson Church
experiments took place after 30 years of modern dance developments in America,
and several years before Britain had even acquired its first modern dance company.
Alston and the X6 were engaging in experiments similar to those explored by Judson
Church Dance Theatre only five years after the introduction of modern dance to
Britain.

It was Merce Cunningham, however, who proved to be a major influence on Alston.
Cunningham had first performed in Britain in 1964. Because of his links with artists
such as Robert Rauschenburg and composers such as John Cage, indirectly he
attracted many British musicians and visual artists to the new form of theatre dance
(known as contemporary dance) then being forged in Britain. Many such artists
visited LCDS frequently, some of them taking dance classes alongside the dance
students. It would not be unfair to say that echoes of Judson Church in the 1960s,
where sculptors, composers, dancers and theatre directors collaborated on new
forms of performance, can be detected in London Contemporary Dance School's
early days.

Although Alston was to become one of Britain's early experimental modern dance
artists, he first became interested in dance through ballet, in particular the work of
Frederick Ashton. (Ashton's influence is still apparent in Alston's work.) He also
acknowledges a debt to Fred Astaire, whose influence could be seen in works like
Java (1983) and Stardust (1995). However, it is the work of Merce Cunningham which
has had the greatest influence on Alston throughout his career. Alston was
introduced to Cunningham's work in the late 1960s when still an art student. Later,
as a student at London Contemporary Dance School, he took a course with Viola
Farber, previously a member of the Merce Cunningham Company. Cunningham's
approach to movement made a great impression on Alston, who had been taking
classes in Graham Technique at LCDS. Here he found a way of moving which suited
him both in mind and in body.

Soon after completing his studies at LCDS Alston formed Strider, and began his career as a
choreographer in earnest. His works at that time explored the compositional ideas developed by
Cunningham, and Cage, with their emphasis on chance procedures and the unexpected.

In 1973, Strider's second year of operation, Alston worked with Mary Fulkerson, an American dance
artist who had become Head of Movement studies at Dartington College of Arts in Devon. She was to
become the second major influence on his movement style.

Fulkerson introduced Alston to movement forms developed from what is now known as 'release technique' and contact improvisation. These movement techniques use anatomical principles, in particular the use of skeletal alignment rather than muscular power, as their foundation. The result is a softer, more flowing way of moving than those techniques which emphasise the use of muscle to activate movement. Alston studied these techniques in detail. Their influence on his movement can still be detected a quarter of a century later.

In 1975 Alston left London to study with Cunningham in New York. Whilst there he saw the work of artists such as Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, both of whom had been involved with Judson Church Theatre in its early days. This period of study and immersion in the New York dance scene proved to be a turning point in his career.

Returning to Britain with a deeper knowledge of the movement source for his work, Alston took Cunningham's movement, and choreographic ideas, and transformed them to suit his own way of working. He combined the detail and clarity of Cunningham's movement with the soft, released weightiness of the Release techniques he had learned under the guidance of Mary Fulkerson in the early 1970s. He drew on the results of Cunningham's chance procedures for example, the density of the stage picture caused by the unpredictable spatial and rhythmic connections in the movement of dancers - but brought them under the control of his choreographic imagination. Unlike Cunningham he deliberately worked towards a closer relationship between movement and music, whilst maintaining the excitement of unexpected links between the two. The choreographic style Alston developed as a result of his time in America has stayed with him throughout his career.

On his return to Britain in 1977 Alston formed a small ad hoc group Richard Alston and Dancers. Amongst its members were Ian Spink and Siobhan Davies, later to become major choreographers in their own right. (Ian Spink became the artistic director of Second Stride and Siobhan Davies formed Siobhan Davies and Dancers 3). Richard Alston and Dancers, unlike Strider, performed only Alston's choreography. Alston supplemented his income by teaching during this period. In doing so he performed a service of immense importance to British Independent Dance by introducing a whole generation of young British dance artists to Cunningham's dance technique and choreographic practices. This had a profound and lasting influence on the developing Independent Dance scene in Britain.

Although some of Alston's pieces during this period retained the earlier connections with experimental dance work, by 1977 his work was becoming increasingly aligned to a more conventional theatre dance tradition. In 1980 he was asked to create a work for Ballet Rambert (Bell High). Soon afterwards Rambert's artistic director invited Alston to become the company's Resident Choreographer. Six years later Alston was appointed the Company's artistic director.

During his artistic directorship of Ballet Rambert, which lasted until 1992, Alston introduced general dance audiences across Britain to a more rigorously formalist
mode of modern dance. Under Alston’s directorship the company’s repertoire moved towards works which celebrated pure dance, dance for its own sake, rather than dance as a means of telling a story or expressing extreme emotions. (Here too there is a link between Alston’s artistic development and that of Cunningham, for Cunningham also rejected the more theatrical mode of modern dance found in the work of Martha Graham, with whom he had danced for several years). Alston changed the name of the company to Rambert Dance Company and invited artists such as Cunningham himself, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs and David Gordon to create works for its programmes. He also nurtured younger British choreographers, including Ashley Page of the Royal Ballet (Carmen Arcadiæ:1986; Soldat: 1987; and Curralaq: 1989), Laurie Booth (Completely Birdland: 1991) and Mark Baldwin (Island to Island: 1991; Gone: 1992).

During this period Alston’s interest in contemporary art and music was brought to bear on contemporary dance. Rambert’s repertoire was particularly rich in terms of its design elements during Alston’s tenure. Whilst Ballet Rambert and London Contemporary Dance Theatre had long had an association with contemporary composers, Alston was responsible for incorporating the work of a wealth of contemporary painters and sculptors into the dance field, and thus introducing dance audiences not only to new music, but also to new movements in the visual arts. He commissioned British visual artists such as Richard Smith (Wildlife: 1984), Howard Hodgkin (Night Music: 1981; Pulcinella: 1987) and John Hoyland (Zansa: 1986), to create designs for his works. (He had already used a sculpture by minimalist artist Nigel Hall for Soda Lake, the solo he created for Michael Clark in 1981.) Alston also consistently used musical scores from late twentieth century contemporary composers, most notably Nigel Osborne (Apollo Distraught: 1982; Wildlife: 1984; Zansa: 1986; and Mythologies: 1985), and Peter Maxwell Davies (Bell High: 1980 and Hymnos: 1988). More recently he has created works to the music of Harrison Birtwistle and Iannis Xenakis, both contemporary composers with long-standing international reputations. All of these artists, choreographers, painters, sculptors and composers had international reputations in their own field, but were less well known amongst the general dance audience.

The dance pieces which took place in this environment of contemporary visual art and music were multi-layered works and were not easy to take in fully on the first viewing. In this way they bore a resemblance to the work of many contemporary authors, composers and painters. Alston aimed for his own work to have as much substance as contemporary literature, visual art and music, and attracted a great deal of respect in the art world. His work showed that this kind of work, although challenging, could be as enjoyable as works which were easier to understand on first viewing.

Alston’s artistic policy gained the support of many audience members both young and old (many of the young audience members found the work so interesting that
they went on to study dance and to work in the profession. However, it seems that the step he was asking people to make was seen as too great at a time when artistic conservatism was becoming dominant in Britain. Artistic success is frequently judged on the grounds of the number of people who are in the audience (a measure of its accessibility), rather than on the long-term artistic value of what had been produced. In the early 1990s, audiences for contemporary dance in general were diminishing, those for Rambert Dance Company amongst them. In 1992 Alston's period as artistic director of one of Britain's major modern dance companies came to an end and the company began to produce more easily accessible work.

After a short period as a free-lance choreographer, in 1994 Alston became artistic director of The Place in London. The Place is a Choreographic Centre and the home of LCDS. He formed his own touring dance company at the same time. The Richard Alston Dance Company, a middle scale company of ten dancers, is based at The Place. This company has given Alston an opportunity to develop as an artist and to explore more emotionally resonant choreographic pathways.

Whilst Alston has maintained his interest in contemporary music, working to the music of composers such as Harrison Birtwistle (Orpheus Singing and Dreaming and Secret Theatre both 1996) and Iannis Xenakis (Okha: 1996), he is increasingly using the music of composers from earlier times. He used Purcell for Delicious Arbour, created in 1993 for the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, seventeenth century composer Denis Gaultier for Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms (1997), and eighteenth century composer Jean-Philippe Rameau for Brisk Singing (1997).

Alston’s choreographic emphasis is less rigorously formalist than it was at the height of his period at Rambert Dance Company. Indeed a noticeable interest in the emotional content underlying movement, and in works which refer directly to human relationships, can be detected in more recent work as he returns to a more intimate investigation of the possibilities choreography can offer.

**Alston's approach to choreography**

Alston's approach to choreography, which includes not only the way he creates his work but also the way he views space and time, and sees the dancer as both performer and as human being, and his dream for dance as a major player in the world of the arts, all contribute to the longevity of his career as a choreographer.

Alston’s choreographic process is rooted in his respect for the dancer, as artist and as individual, in his love of music, and in his love of movement for its own sake. The three combine to produce work which is simultaneously rigorous and humane. His working process is at the same time intuitive and highly analytic, the dialogue between the two in perfect balance. His analytic mind comes into play after the intuitive response to dancer and music has been made in the studio, and is responsible for the highly refined structures which characterise Alston's work.
However, implicitly, it also informs the way he manipulates movement, as does his knowledge of other arts.

Alston’s knowledge of the principles underlying dance, music, the visual arts, architecture and literature gives his intuitive responses to the material produced in the studio a breadth and depth not normally associated with the term ‘intuition’. (Alston, like all mature artists, exercises what we might call ‘informed’ intuition, his spontaneous responses drawing on many years of experience and knowledge of the art form to which he has devoted his life for thirty years.) He draws on ideas taken from the compositional frameworks and details employed in other art forms in his own work, transforming them so that they become integral to the dance work. His curiosity about the world around him also serves to enrich his work, and keep it fresh. Ideas stimulated by the intricate structure of a baroque building, or the unfamiliar shapes and sounds of the arts of other cultures, or the placement of figures in a painting, in one way or another eventually find their way into the matrix of his pieces. His finely tuned eye for structure, both at a micro and a macro level, is also informed by these multiple images. It is this rich and various sense of form which is brought to bear on the material as he refines it, shapes it, and organises it into a clearly balanced whole.

Movement
Alston’s movement influences, as noted, have been drawn from the work of Cunningham, Release techniques and from early British ballet, in particular the work of Ashton, who perhaps epitomises a British ballet style. The Cunningham influence has been well-documented⁵, and is clearly the most dominant in his work. However, Alston’s other artistic influences served to modify it in a way which has made both his movement style and his choreographic style genuinely original.

Alston consistently cites Frederick Ashton as a major influence on his work. One can see this both in characteristics of Alston’s movement style and in the character of many of his more lyrical works. The way Alston uses the back and épaulement, and the intricacy of the steps he uses in certain of his works can be traced back to Ashton (who has roots in Cecchetti, the ballet style which characterised British ballet for many decades) as can the humanity of the ‘characters’ he presents on the stage in his more lyrical works. A Field of Mustard created for Siobhan Davies and Juliet Fisher in 1980 to the music of Vaughan Williams is a fine example of the latter, as are works like Midsummer (1983), Night Music (1981), Voices and Light Footsteps (1984), Sad Eyes (1994) and Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms (1997).

Alston credits Ashton with being a very humane choreographer. This sense of the humane is something which Alston has clearly taken on as a theme throughout his career. His works are rarely, if ever, harsh. Rather they present a world in which all the elements co-operate with each other to create a balanced whole (even the vigorous and challenging works of the mid-nineteen eighties). Ashton is not the only influence here, however. Alston recalls that Pytt Geddes, his T’ai Chi teacher when he was a student at LCDS, argued for art which was a force for good, rather than for art which was always a force for negative criticism of life and society, a position which she considered to have been predominant in the 20th Century. This was a view with
which Alston found himself in accord, then and now. Indeed, he has noted that, even now, he is interested in dance in which a sense of a harmonious community is articulated. Although this could lead to a sentimental view of human behaviour, Alston’s rigorous sense of form enables him to avoid this, as can be seen in works such as Sad Eyes (1994), Delicious Arbour (1993) and Beyond Measure (1996).

An implicit understanding of movement as having its own expressive power, whether or not a movement is intentionally expressing emotion or feeling, also colours Alston’s work. In a recent interview he noted that a movement which simply folds in towards the body implicitly expresses a myriad of ideas, even when not used to express a particular emotion. For example, Odette’s movements in Swan Lake (the emphasis on the movement closing in towards the body, then quietly flowing out into the space) are expressive of her general character. They contrast quite clearly with those of Odile, whose sharp, extended, linear movements (and thirty two fouettés) are an unmistakable expression of her confidence and sense of ownership of the world she inhabits. Whilst the movement performed in these roles are essentially abstract movements, they clearly communicate certain human characteristics. When performed in a non-narrative piece traces of these ideas remain. The movements do not express ideas in the way words or more overtly symbolic movements do, but express the ideas of which they are a trace at a far deeper level, one which we understand through the tissues of the body, through the kinaesthetic sense, rather than through a cognitive understanding of the symbolic meaning of a gesture or movement phrase. Alston makes use of the way movement can communicate implicit meanings in this way in his choreographic work.

He gives credit for this finely tuned understanding of the intrinsic expressivity of movement to early teachers at London Contemporary Dance School. Amongst these was Belinda Quirey, an expert in historical dance, who taught at LCDS when Alston was a student. Quirey gave Alston insights into movement which have lasted to this day. Alston has commented that she made him realise how movement itself, its shape, its quality, its dimensions could be intrinsically expressive. The posture and gestures of Renaissance and Baroque dance, which were confident and generous in their use of space, expressed an ownership of the space in which they moved. And of course, many of those dancing the pavane, the basse dance, the gigue or the courante in the courts and great houses did own the physical space in which they moved (and many of the people who were in the halls in which they danced). Their generous gestures, the way they traversed the space in which they performed all declared, "This belongs to me". This attitude to space found its way into early ballet, which has its derivation in the court dances of the Renaissance and Baroque era, and can still be seen today in the arm gestures and the way stage space is used in classical ballet.

Although a modern dance choreographer, Alston has inherited (and exploits) the pleasure of the space in which the dancer moves, which is articulated in court dances. Indeed in Bellezza Flash (1982), created to the music of Monteverdi, one gets both that movement sense and a sense of the niceties of the social relationships which characterised the society in which they developed. More recently this can be seen in Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms and Brisk Singing. Alston also makes
extensive use of openness of gesture in both arms and legs (a variant of the rond de jambe en dehors is a common feature of his movement vocabulary) to indicate that his dancers have ownership of, and take pleasure in, both the space in which they move and their own bodies (open, inclusive gestures exude confidence and self-assurance).

This inclination for the spatial breadth of gesture associated with ballet is moderated by one of Alston’s other early influences, Release technique. Release technique, to which Alston was introduced in the 1970s, draws on the principles of Eastern movement forms such as T’ai Chi. Central characteristics of Eastern movement forms are that the weight is low and the emphasis is on a harmonious, free flow of movement. The arm gestures alternate between circular, peripheral movements and straight, direct movements from the centre. The balance of weight shifts evenly from one foot to the other, keeping the skeleton constantly in a dynamic balance. Centring the body and the energy is central to these Eastern movement forms, and to the Western movement forms derived from them. There is an emphasis on skeletal alignment and lack of muscular tension, on freely flowing movement which circles around the body, gathering the energy in order to send it out, only to gather it in again...The performer’s energy and body is thus always in a dynamic balance, ready to move in any direction, at any moment. (T’ai Chi in its advanced form is a martial art, which demands rapid movement in unexpected directions. Alston’s own movement, although superficially quite different, is characterised by its rapid shifts in direction and focus of energy.)

Alston applied all these qualities, along with those derived from the movement characteristics of historical dance, and to some degree from early ballet to develop his own style of movement. Whilst clearly derived from Cunningham, with its objective stance and clarity of line and structure, it has a distinctly Alston quality, a slightly softer, more human character. Alston’s movement has contained elements with a characteristically liquid quality for much of his career (although in the mid-nineteen eighties he explored extensively a more impactative, powerful style of movement with works such as Dangerous Liaisons: 1985 and Wildlife: 1984 Zansa: 1986; Strong Language: 1987; and Hymnos 1988). This qualitative preference could be seen as having its roots in his work with Fulkerson as well as his love of Ashton’s work.

Alston has also observed that the way specific movements are used during the course of a dance, that is, their place in the structure of a work, can play an expressive role. He notes that, in The Sleeping Beauty, the steps used in the four fairies’ solos at Aurora’s christening re-appear in Aurora’s solo at her birthday ball ⁹. The fairies’ gifts to Aurora were aspects of her future character. The solo Aurora performs at her “coming of age” ball articulates the character she has developed, some of it as a result of the fairies’ gifts. The use in this solo of the steps performed by the fairies as they endowed her with their gifts is a way of expressing this notion choreographically. Alston has consciously made use of the intrinsic expressive qualities of movement, and of movement in space in his works, even in his most
rigorously formal pieces (e.g. Zansa 1986; Hymnos: 1988). Each work acquires its own distinctive character and expressive sub-text purely through Alston’s use of movement as a formal element of dance. More recently Alston has begun to exploit these insights deliberately in service of a more human subject matter.

Duets and gender

Alston is particularly aware that the formal relationships of men and women in the space, and with each other have implicit resonance at the level of sexual politics, whatever the movement might be. He has explored these ideas quite deliberately. Using the same material twice in a piece, but exchanging the genders of the performers occurs in recent works such as Brisk Singing Soda Lake (1981), originally made for a male dancer, was subsequently performed by two different female dancers (Kate Price and Amanda Britton). The exchange of gender in the casting implies that the ‘roles’, and thus the movement, in these works are not gender specific.

However, although in some of his earlier pieces, (e.g. Doublework 1978), he worked towards an equality of weight: taking in the duet material, implicitly articulating the notion that men and women were equal, this approach has gradually given way to the use of lifts in which the male dancer will more frequently lift the female dancer than the reverse. Alston argues that the reason is purely physical, the man having broad shoulders and a low centre of gravity, tends to be more secure over a wider range of movement than the woman when lifting. “I have given into that” 11. Nevertheless, he has long been aware that the intrinsic expressive content of such lifts offer a sub-text of socially conventional male-female pattern of relationships. This he acknowledges, but says he is not interested in changing the way he creates certain duets in the interests of adhering to a particular line of thinking. Nevertheless, his duets continue to present many perspectives of one-to-one human relationships. He has frequently made duets for men, from Voices and light Footsteps (1984) through Pulcinella (1987), to his more recent work Rumours, Visions (1994), the subject of which was the relationship between Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, as well as his duets for women, in addition to those which follow the more conventional male/female coupling.

Choreographic process

Alston creates his works by generating phrases of movement material and then, like Cunningham, putting two or more pieces of movement material in the space at the same time. Unlike Cunningham, however, Alston then works on the ‘accidents’ of rhythm, of spatial connection in the movement, of relationships of dancers in the space to make them structural features of the piece. As he notes in the video, he sometimes calls this his ‘mediaeval’ method of choreographing. Alston observes that, before music notation began to fix the pitch value of individual notes, two or more strands of vocal music would be sung together creating what he describes as “strange” harmonies. To our ears, which are used to the more stable harmonies
which result from the practice of fixing pitch values for notes, such combinations of musical lines create a slight tension, a ‘pull’ of one sound against another. This gives a fascinating resonance to the music which results from using this method. Alston has transposed these ideas in his work, finding places where two movements, when performed together, create a slight tension as (structurally) they pull away from each other and places where movements come into line with each other, creating movements of ease and calm. This is clearly shown in the final sections of the video in which Alston analyses a canon and ‘Chantez le Dieu’ from Brisk singing (1997).

Alston also recalls on the video that John Cage, one of the twentieth century’s most radically experimental composers, once noted that the relationship between music and dance can be one of imitation of rhythms and patterns and one where the dance pulls against the music. Cage suggests that the latter is like syncopation in jazz music, the rhythm always pulling against the metric framework in which it takes place. (This rapprochement between ideas from quite different sources is typical of Alston.) Alston uses a similar pattern in his relationship with music, working both ‘on’ the music and in the ‘spaces’ between the notes and phrases. Through working in this way he creates pieces which are densely textured, but which have a clarity of form which makes them legible to the eye.

The density of texture which Alston creates is a deliberate aesthetic choice, and a choice which goes far beyond a liking for a visual complexity. Alston believes strongly that dance has the potential to be as rich and intricate an art form as twentieth century music, visual art and literature. He firmly believes that dance works should have sufficient depth to be open to being seen several times. His own work has uncompromisingly pursued this line since his very early days. As can be seen from the examples shown in the video this complexity has as its foundation in very precise and clear thinking, which may be the reason that Alston’s work, far from remaining obscure or abstruse, has become more accessible to a general audience over the years.

Music

A great deal of focus has been the given to Alston’s interest in the relationship between music and dance in the past. Indeed, his work has shown for many years that the relationship between music and dance can enrich the structural textures of both art forms.

Alston acknowledges the primacy of music in his work and stresses that it plays a very important part in his life as a whole. He has an eclectic taste in music and has attended concerts for pleasure for many years. He enjoys contemporary early twentieth and pre-twentieth century concert music equally.

From the early 1970s he has used the music of 18th century composers such as Handel and Purcell as well as that of contemporary composers, some of whom he commissioned to make works for his pieces. This pattern has continued to the present day. In addition Alston consistently used popular music, particularly from the first half of the twentieth century. The works of artists such as Cole Porter, the Inkspots (Java: 1983); Fats Waller (Sugar: 1981) and George Gershwin (Rhapsody in
Blue: 1988) have featured in his work from its inception, the most recent being Hoagy Carmichael’s “Stardust” (Stardust: 1995).

Alston uses the work of British composers extensively. He has used pieces by acknowledged masters such as Purcell, Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle and has also used younger British composers Simon Waters (Dangerous Liaisons: 1984); Nigel Osborne (Apollo Distraught: 1983; Wildlife: 1984; Mythologies: 1985; Zansa: 1986), Simon Holt (Shadow Realm: 1995) and David Sawer (Cat’s Eyes: 1992).

Although Alston has commissioned scores from composers for his work in the past (for instance, from Nigel Osborne and Jim Fulkerson) he prefers to use pre-existing music, believing that he can do the music more justice if he has time to get to know it well before he starts choreographing his work. Indeed, he frequently finds that it is a piece of music itself which serves as the genesis for a dance piece. However, Alston does not merely use the music he chooses (for example, he does not simply echo the musical forms and structures, rather he works with the music), attempting to locate the composers deeper musical intentions, particularly at a structural level, and working with and around those in his choreography.

Alston has a sophisticated musical ear. He refers directly to the musical score throughout the choreographic process, both in the studio and during his preparations, analysing the structures of the music in considerable detail, and exploiting its more intricate structures. His understanding of the specific complexities of the instrumental writing in works such as Pulcinella (Stravinsky), Zansa (Osborne) and Le Matreau sans Maitre (1992, Boulez), provided Alston with something rich and challenging to work within as a choreographer.

Alston’s knowledge of both music and dance ensures that his response to a musical score achieves a level of sophistication which goes far beyond an instant response to a melody. Indeed, by the time Alston enters the studio to start making a work he has listened to the music to such an extent that it has become familiar enough to allow him to give in to his intuitive responses to its forms and structures knowing that his responses will not let the music down. This response often takes the form of a complex dialogue. For example, he will foreground elements of the musical structure which a composer or conductor might see as a deeper component of the musical form.

One frequently finds that elements of the music which a musician would conceive of as a textural detail play a central role in an Alston piece. A particular instrumental line, for example, might become the framework upon which a complex piece of ensemble dancing depends. (I can recall a music rehearsal of one of Rambert’s pieces in the late 1980s when one instrumentalist was absent during a ‘music call’.)
The absence of that line of music caused the dancers fundamental problems with the timing of entrances, as it was that particular instrumental line upon which the structure of their dance material, a complex, very tight canon was based.) Through such dialogues between the music and the dance, the musical works to which Alston choreographs, although remaining as powerful in their own right as ever they were, are enriched through their relationship with the dance material.

**Space**

In the video *Essential Alston*, Alston talks about his love of the English people’s obsession with mathematical structure. It is clear from his examples, which range from the perpendicularic style gothic architecture taken up by the English in the late middle ages, through hammer-beam roofs, to the mathematical combinations of bell-ringers, that his understanding of mathematical structure spans not only the numerical (and thus the rhythmic and the musical) but also the geometric (and thus the spatial). His work itself, in both its spatial forms and its rhythmic structures, are evidence of this way of thinking.

The spatial architecture of Alston’s pieces, particularly in terms of the use of the stage space, is an important, if neglected aspect of his work. The spatial structure of the work, both in terms of the clarity of the shape and shaping of the movement and the traces of architectural geometry created by the movement of the dancers in the space itself, are rooted in his understanding of the characteristics of the spaces humankind has created for its own pleasure. The space in which the dancers move takes on the characteristics of these spaces.

Alston’s understanding of space is derived in part from his love of architecture, but also owes not a little debt to the understanding of the danced space he gained from his work with Belinda Quirey. This was seen clearly in *Voices and Light Footsteps* (1984), but possibly most powerful in *Zansa* (1986).

*Zansa* was, perhaps the zenith of his work in what I call his ‘new complexity’ phase, an approach to choreography which held Alston’s interest during the 1980s. In his work during this period he used a clarity of spatial organisation in the performance space to delinate the broad structures of the piece. Within this the more detailed and complex internal rhythmic and spatial characteristics of the movement materials were contained. *Zansa* was an immensely complex piece, both musically and choreographically. However, it was able to make itself legible to its audience by virtue of the security of its formal architecture.

This confidence in the use of the performance space was echoed in works such as *Chicago Brass* (1983), *Dangerous Liaisons* (1985) and the more recent *Le Marteau sans Maitre* (1992). In all these pieces, and indeed many others of his more complex
works, the use of the larger geometrical structures of the performance space serves as a means of framing and thus stabilising the intricate internal structures. This device allows Alston to achieve his goal of making dance simultaneously both complex and legible. A more minimal, but equally effective use of space can be detected in recent works, in particular Orpheus Singing and Dreaming (1996) and Beyond Measure (1996). In both these pieces Alston used the formal organisation of the space overtly to emphasize the themes he was working on.

Dancers
Alston chooses his dancers carefully. The dancers in his present company are all highly trained and between them cover a wide range of movement skills. However, they are also of different ages and have very different physical characteristics. Each individual dancer has a unique way of moving, the group of dancers between them creating a rich resource for movement and for ideas. However, their role in the ensemble is also important. Dancers are selected not only for their individual skills, but also for the way they will fit in, both as human beings and as dancers, with the rest of the company they are to join. It is important to Alston that his companies are contented ones, and that the dancers are considerate towards each other. This, for Alston, makes not only for a contented community of dancers, but also a greater chance of making good work.

A dancer’s individuality as a performer is something in which Alston has always been interested. If each dancer performs the same movement with slightly different emphasis, a variety of nuances of the movement are generated. This gives his work a depth of texture that a ‘well-drilled’ corps of dancers could not achieve. The richness of the movement of the human body, and the variety of ways of performing that movement, are part of the grist of Alston’s approach to dance. Indeed, he has claimed since the beginning of his career that his imagination is stirred by the dancer in him - or herself. As far back as June 1978 he gave an interview to Dance and Dancers in which, when asked what the starting points for his pieces were, he answered: "I start thinking about what excites me about those people and the best way they could work together and who could do duets with whom and who had to move fast and so on. Basically I am stimulated by the people I make the piece for". (Dance and Dancers June 1978, p22)

Even when working within a relatively large-scale company such as Rambert Dance Company, Alston drew on the skills and personal styles of his dancers and frequently made works for particular dancers, as a parting ‘gift’ when they left the company. In these works the dancer was given a prominent role in which his or her particular movement characteristics were displayed to the full.

His skill at drawing out the best in a dancer is clearly evidenced in Soda Lake (1981) and Dutiful Ducks (1982), two solos he made for Michael Clark, then a very recent graduate of the Royal Ballet School. Clark, being Cecchetti trained, had all the characteristics Alston loved, the épaulement, the use of the back, the elegance of line. He also had an assured sense of balance and of weight, and a luxuriant fluidity.
Significantly, Alston’s work is not pre-conceived, but is developed in the studio, on
and with the dancers. Indeed, watching Alston work in the studio reveals just how
much the dancers contribute to the work as it progresses. When he develops
movement Alston works directly with the dancers. He does not prepare the steps in
advance, rather he allows those steps to emerge as he works with them in response
to his sense of the individual dancer’s physicality and particular dance skills (for
example, jumping, turning, rapid footwork). In this sense his first responses are
intuitive, not analytic, the latter being brought to bear later when refining the
structural and qualitative nuances of the work.

Alston is quite clear, however, that he does not believe that the role of the dancer in
the choreographer/dancer collaboration is to contribute the movement material
itself. That, for him, is the job of the choreographer alone. The dancer, nevertheless,
does have a clear role to play in the development of each of Alston’s works, as the
pieces in his repertoire show. Although Alston choreographs the movement himself,
sketching it out in the studio with his own body, he modifies it in line with the way the
dancer/s with whom he is working interpret his demonstration of the material. As the
dancers note in ‘Essential Alston’, often their mistakes are incorporated into the
material, resulting in movement phrases which differ from those Alston initially
choreographed. Seeing, and exploiting, the potential of ‘mistakes’ is part of Alston’s
choreographic process.

The combination of Alston’s respect for his collaborators, whether they be dancers,
designers, composers or musicians and his rigorous approach to making work, give
his pieces a compositional strength and rigour which is evident in even his smaller
works. Alston is quite clear that he considers that contemporary dance has as much
to contribute to our culture as the other arts, and has worked throughout his career
to align it with those arts which are taken more seriously in the public domain, for
example, visual art, music and theatre. The respect accorded to his work by
members not only of the dance world but also the world of music and the visual arts
indicate that he has gone a long way towards achieving that goal.
Notes
1 X6 was temporarily housed in the top floor of a warehouse at Butler’s Wharf on the edge of the Thames. Members of the collective included Fergus Early, Jacky Lansley, Emlyn Claid, Mary Prestidge and Maedee Dupres. When the refurbishment of Butlers Wharf began in 1980 X6 had to close its doors. New premises were found in Mile End, East London and Chisenhale Dance Space took over the role X6 had played in encouraging experimental choreography (see chapter 2 of Striding Out, by Stephanie Jordan and Judith Mackrell’s Out of Line for more information on the collective.)
2 Now known as the London Contemporary Dance School. All further reference to the school will use this name or the initials LCDS.
3 See Striding Out (Jordan, 1992) and Out of Line (Mackrell, 1992) for information on these artists.
4 Work which focuses on dance as form and structure rather than as a means of telling a story or expressing emotion.
5 see Striding Out
6 Unpublished interview with Christopher Thomson 1997
7 ibid.
8 ibid.
9 For further discussion of these ideas see “Decoding Dance” by Sarah Rubidge in Dance Theatre Journal Vol. 7 No. 2 Autumn 1989 pp2-7
10 See Sophie Constanti’s interview with Alston in Dance Theatre Journal op.cit. pp 14-16
11 ibid.
12 See section on Alston in Striding Out, pp. 105-130
13 A rehearsal of Pulcinella
14 Normally dancers rehearse to taped music. A music call is the rehearsal when the musicians who play the piece live are all present, allowing the dancers to hear the full nuances of the musical score and the musicians (and dancers) to adjust tempi if necessary.
15 Here I have appropriated a description given to the work of a group of contemporary British composers, including Michael Finnissy, to which the complexity of Alston’s work of this period is analogous.
16 For a detailed discussion of several of Alston’s work, including Zansa see Striding Out pp105-130
Essential Alston

Suggestions for Further Study
In this section I have chosen to focus on different elements from each dance extract. Some ideas elaborate on Richard's discussion, whilst others focus on further related possibilities. I have addressed various areas of dance study, giving opportunities to promote discussion and analyse movement as well as suggesting starting points for practical work.

Rebecca Seymour (1998)
Former Education Officer for RADC

Marine from Rumours, Visions
Imagery and Interpretation

Richard discusses images from the sea, such as sunlight glinting on water and reflections bouncing off the waves. The movement in this section reflects the patterns of the waves and the sun 'dancing' on the surface, inspired as much by Britten's orchestration as by the words of Rimbaud's poem.

Marine
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.

A further enhancement of the imagery is the way the ragged edges of the costumes swirl round the dancers as they turn. These images were clear in Richard's mind whilst he choreographed this section, but are they as apparent to the new viewer? Try showing the students the extract on its own, encouraging them to think about the movement and what it suggests to them, before they hear Richard's discussion. This section of Les Illuminations deals with images of the sea, which Britten illustrates in the music. A link could be made to the Four Sea Interludes from Britten's opera Peter Grimes and his opera Billy Budd, both of which depict the sea in different moods.

Analysis and Structure
Look at the simplicity of the overall structure in this section - clear unison in duets, leading to unison in the quartet. However, the complexity lies in the rhythm and the way the dance and music relate - an important factor when analysing Richard's work.
Explore the choreographic possibilities offered by setting simple movement structures against more complex rhythms.

Richard describes his reactions to the pictures in Doris Humphrey’s book The Art of Making Dances. Show students these pictures to promote discussion on what they think looks ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

**Okho**

Analysis and Structure

The movement evokes the weighty sound of the three drums and Richard talks about capturing the speed of the drumming in the dance.

The duet takes the following structure:

**Opposition**

(Note: Richard speaks of the dancers ‘mirroring’ each other, however technically at the beginning of the piece they are facing one another, but working in opposition – a good point for discussion.)

Unison – the dancers shift to dancing side by side in exact unison.

Contrast – there are moments when the dancers each have their own movement, which is not shared.

Look out for the subtle shifts between these choreographic structures and identify the movements which alter the dancers’ relationship.

**Level 1**

Explore ways of making movement weighty

Look at the spatial patterns of the male duet.

Using these spatial patterns, choreograph a duet which incorporates both opposition and side by side unison.

**Level 2**

After identifying the subtle shifts in the dancers’ relationship (above task), experiment with ways of transferring from one relationship to another in a duet.

**Creative Links**

The circular patterns clearly seen in this duet could be related to the circular shape of the *Djembe* (African drum) and the circle in which African drummers often play.

Iannis Xenakis is a contemporary Greek composer and so a further connection could be made to the circular patterns of Greek traditional dance. Experiment with the qualities of different percussion instruments and how they inform the movement.
Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms
This piece evokes quiet interiors, privacy and moments of great intimacy. Visual art, like music, is often a stimulus when Richard is creating work. He refers to 17th Century Dutch painting as an inspiration for Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms, particularly referring to paintings of a music lesson, such as those by Vermeer, or Gabriel Metsu. The sculptures of Henry Moore are another source of inspiration for him.

Theme and Variations
In the first duet, which uses the 17th Century music of Denis Gaultier, the choreography contrasts intimacy and formality. There is a sense of deep affection underlying the duet, but the formal behaviour of the 17th Century is also clearly apparent. The themes of contrast and variation are points to focus on throughout the sections shown.
Watch the first duet (accompanied by the Gaultier music) and identify all the different points of physical contact.

Level 1
Choose four of the ways in which the dancers make contact and create a duet incorporating them.

Level 2
Using these points of contact, develop them into weight-bearing moments. Experiment with contrasting moments of intimacy and of formality. Look out for the example of a parallel Graham contraction.

Richard talks about Jo Kondo (the 20th Century Japanese composer whose music is used in the second section of Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms) being inspired by Gaultier’s use of ‘Style Brise’. This musical term describes when a chord (a set of notes played at the same time) is drawn out, so that the notes are played separately, one after the other. This ‘lengthens’ the music, almost ‘stretching’ time. The music is structured in repeated phrases, which are quite difficult to identify. There is a music marker at the start of each phrase, after which the phrase is ornamented (extra notes added to the original phrase when repeated) – again, in the style of Gaultier.

Create a simple movement phrase, which may just involve steps, basic body actions, etc.

Repeat this basic phrase, but add ornamentation - eg. hand gestures, facial expression, changes of direction, etc. The original phrase must still be identifiable and a specific movement marker should be shown at the beginning of the phrase each time. This should help students to understand the musical structure, by translating it into a similar form in movement.
Analysis and Structure
Make a comparison between the Gaultier duet and the Kondo section. How does Richard bring movement into the 20th Century? (Guidance - look at how the female role changes and compare the qualities in the move me

Recitative from Brisk Singing
Complexity and Legibility
Canon and Variations

This male trio illustrates how a choreographic device such as canon can be used in a complex way to add texture and density to the movement. Each phrase is performed quite slowly and we can see the breakdown of the three parts when it is demonstrated. However, when the trio is put together, do we see the three parts separately, or does it become a complex flow of movement, in which we do not necessarily spot the canon?

In what ways does Jason’s material vary from that of the other two?

Experiment with simple forms of canon, then make the structure more complex by adding different directions for each dancer and a third person with variations.

Look for more versions of canon in the other dance extracts on the video.

Chantez Le Dieu from Brisk Singing
Analysis and Structure

Richard dissects this section of Brisk Singing clearly, to show how the layers of movement relate to the music and how each dancer connects with the others.

Henri’s opening phrase has certain moments of precision and is quite ‘impactive’, whereas Sam’s phrase has more freedom of movement with wide expansive leaps that travel through the space. The rhythms in the music are reflected in the dance, with one dancer taking the melody of the voice and another making reference to the orchestra underneath. However, the dancers’ movements pick up on different parts of the music, swapping constantly, giving the whole piece a rich texture.

Identify moments in this section where the relationship between dance and music can be clearly seen. (Examples - triplet phrase, ‘trudge’ step, ends of phrases.)

Interpretation in performance

Compare the first duet (Henri and Sam) with the second (Rachel and Chris). Look at the spatial relationships and the subtle differences between the two pairs.

Rachel dances Henri’s part and Chris dances Sam’s. Discuss the differences in the movement when it is performed by different dancers. Address points such as gender, physique, interpretation, movement quality.
Link this to Richard’s point towards the end of the video about how he uses his dancers’ individuality within the ensemble.

Choreograph a movement phrase and watch it performed by different people. Note the differences in interpretation, despite dancing the same material.

Observation

Watch the whole of *Chantez Le Dieu* and identify examples of the five types of jump - Jump (2 to 2), Hop (1 to same 1), Leap (1 to other 1), Assemblé (1 to 2), Sisone (2 to 1).
Music References
Benjamin Britten Les Illuminations Opus 18

Ainsley, Britten Sinfonia / Cleobury
EMI Eminence 7243 5 65899 2 6

Iannis Xenakis Okho
Trio Le Cercle Disques Montaigne 1991 782002

Denis Gaultier La Rétorique des Dieux Suites pour le luth I, II, XII
Hopkinson-Smith
Auvidis-Astrée 1976/1989 E7778

Jo Kondo Ars Brevis from Jo Kondo in Yokohama

Musica Practica Ensemble Alm Records ALCD-36
Jean-Philippe Rameau Les Boréades

Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner
Erato-disques 1990 2292-45572-2
Richard Alston Choreochronicle
Taken from the Teacher’s Booklet, by Sarah Rubidge, accompanying the Essential Alston video.

1968
Transit (Ronald Lopresti) London School of Contemporary Dance Workshop, London
Matrix (Bahutu chant), Student workshop, Acland Burghley School

1969
Something to Do (text : Gertrude Stein), LSCD workshop, London
Still Moving Still (Shakuhachi), LSCD workshop, London
Cycladic Figure (John Cage), LSCD workshop, London

1970
Winter Music (John Cage), LSCD workshop, London
Departing in Yellow (Michael Finnissy) LSCD workshop, London
Pace (Handel), LSCD workshop, London
Nowhere Slowly (Karlheinz Stockhausen), LSCD workshop, London
Goldrush (Neil Young), LSCD workshop, London

1971
End (Michael Finnissy), LSCD workshop, London
Shiftwork (Rossini), LSCD workshop, London
Cold (Adam), LSCD workshop, London
After Follows Before (Wagner), LSCD workshop, London
Who is Twyla Tharp? (spoken text by Peter and Alison Smithson), London Festival Ballet Workshop, London

1972
Combines (Schubert, Bach and Chopin; Songs by Ella Fitzgerald, Connie Boswell, Frances Langford and Mildred Bailey; Film by Sally Potter)
Balkan Sobranie (Jean Francaix, Stravinsky, and Japanese flute music [Fukushimo]), Scottish Ballet, Glasgow
Routine Couple (Taped conversation of George Burns and Gracie Allen), Strider, London
Thunder (Harold Arlen’s Stormy Weather), Strider, London
Tiger Balm (Anna Lockwood), Strider, London
Windhover (Anna Lockwood), Strider, London

1973
Interior (Scott Joplin, Bulgarian folk music), LSCD workshop, London
The Average Leap Forward (Majorca Orchestra), Strider, London
Lay-Out (Anna Lockwood), London Contemporary Dance Theatre, London
1974
Rainbow Bandit (I) (Charles Amirkhanian), Strider, London
Blue Schubert Fragments (Schubert), London Contemporary Dance Theatre, London
Soft Verge / Hard Shoulder (Anna Lockwood), Strider, Bingley, Yorkshire
Split (Philip Corner [after Chopin]), Strider, Paris
Slow Field (Stephen Montague), Strider, Sheffield

1975
Souvenir (Erik Satie), Strider, London
Zero Through Nine (Stephen Montague), Strider, London
Two Saints in Three Acts, Strider, Sheffield
Standard Steps (Satie / Voice of Marcel Duchamp), Strider, Oxford
Compass, Strider, Nottingham
Slight Adventure, Miriam Berns / Albert Reid, New York

1976
Solo Soft Verge, Eva Karczag, New York
Edge, Christopher Bannerman / Siobhan Davies / Sally Hess, New York
UnAmerican Activities, Alston / Bannerman / Davies / Karczag, New York

1977
Connecting Passages, Alston / Ruth Barnes, New York
Blueprint, Extemporary Dance Theatre, Hornchurch, Essex
Rainbow Bandit (II), London Contemporary Dance Theatre

1978
Home Ground (Purcell), Maedee Dupres, London
Breaking Ground (Purcell), Richard Alston and Dancers, London
Doublework (originally in silence, later to music by James Fulkerson), Richard Alston and Dancers, London
The Seven Deadly Sins (Kurt Weill / B. Brecht), English National Opera, London
Distant Rebound (Gordon Mumma), Richard Alston and Dancers, London
Unknown Banker Buys Atlantic (Cole Porter), Richard Alston and Dancers, London

1979
Behind the Piano (Erik Satie), Richard Alston and Dancers, London
Elegiac Blue (Constant Lambert), Richard Alston and Dancers, London
Dumka (Dvorak), LSCD workshop, London

1980
Bell High (Peter Maxwell Davies), Ballet Rambert, Manchester
Schubert Dances (Schubert), Maedee Dupres, Bristol
The Field of Mustard (Vaughan Williams), Siobhan Davies and Juliet Fisher, London
Landscape (Vaughan Williams), Ballet Rambert, Bristol
Rainbow Ripples (Charles Amirkhanian), Ballet Rambert, Oxford
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production</th>
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| 1981 | **Sugar** (Fats Waller), Belinda Neave, Derby Playhouse  
**The Rite of Spring** (Stravinsky), Ballet Rambert, London  
**Soda Lake** (Sculpture by Nigel Hall), Michael Clark, London  
**Swedish Dances** (Swedish folk music), Richard Alston and Mary Fulkerson, Darlington Festival, Devon  
**Berceuse** (Chopin), Lucy Burge, Derby  
**Night Music** (Mozart), Ballet Rambert, Newcastle |
| 1982 | **Bellezza Flash** (Monteverdi), Michael Clark, Siobhan Davies, and Tom Jobe, for ‘The South Bank Show’, London Weekend Television  
**Danse fra Pagodernes Rige** (Britten), Royal Danish Ballet, Copenhagen  
**Dutilful Ducks** (Amirkhanian), Michael Clark, London  
**Crown Diamonds** (Auber), Rambert Academy, London  
**Apollo Distraught** (Nigel Osborne), Ballet Rambert, London  
**Fantasie** (Mozart), Ballet Rambert, London |
| 1983 | **Chicago Brass** (Paul Hindemith), Ballet Rambert, Birmingham  
**Facing Out** (Lindsay Cooper), Maedee Dupres, London  
**Java** (The Inkspots), Second Stride, Leeds  
**The Brilliant and The Dark** (Benjamin Britten), Second Stride, Leeds  
**Missummer** (Michael Tippett), Royal Ballet, London |
| 1984 | **Voices and Light Footsteps** (Monteverdi), Ballet Rambert, London  
**Wildlife** (Nigel Osborne), Ballet Rambert, Brighton  
**Coursing** (Oliver Knussen), Ashley Page, Bruce Sansom, London |
| 1985 | **Mythologies** (Nigel Osborne), Ballet Rambert, London  
**Dangerous Liaisons** (Simon Waters), Ballet Rambert, Southampton  
**Cutter** (John Marc Gowans), Extemporary Dance Theatre, Epsom, Surrey |
| 1986 | **Zansa** (Nigel Osborne), Ballet Rambert, Bradford |
| 1987 | **Pulcinella** (Stravinsky), Ballet Rambert, Leeds  
**Strong Language** (John Marc Gowans), Ballet Rambert, London |
| 1988 | **Rhapsody in Blue** (Gershwin), Rambert Dance Company, Birmingham  
**Hymnos** (Maxwell Davies), Rambert Dance Company, Canterbury |
1989
Cinema (Satie), Rambert Dance Company, Birmingham
Pulau Dewata (Claude Vivier), Rambert Dance Company, London

1990
Dealing with Shadows (Mozart), Rambert Dance Company, London
Roughcut (Steve Reich), Rambert Dance Company, Newcastle

1992
Cat's Eye (David Sawyer), Rambert Dance Company, Bristol
Le Marteau sans Maitre (Pierre Boulez), Compagnie Chopinot, La Rochelle, France

1993
Delicious Arbour (Henry Purcell), Shobana Jeyasingh Company, Nottingham

1994
Prelude and Fugue (Britten), Modern Dance Company of the State Opera, Ankara, Turkey
Movements from Petrushka (Stravinsky), London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Aldeburgh, Suffolk
Sad Eyes (Britten) Richard Alston Dance Company, Aldeburgh, Suffolk
Rumours, Visions (Britten), London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Aldeburgh
Shadow Realm (Simon Holt), Richard Alston Dance Company, Coventry
Lachrymae (extract from Sad Eyes, q.v.), Richard Alston Dance Company, Coventry

1995
Stardust (Original title Sometimes I Wonder, Hoagy Carmichael), Richard Alston Dance Company, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

1996
Orpheus Singing and Dreaming (Harrison Birtwistle), Richard Alston Dance Company, London
Secret Theatre (Harrison Birtwistle), Richard Alston Dance Company, London
Okho (Iannis Xenakis), Richard Alston Dance Company, London
Beyond Measure (original title, Bach Measures, J.S. Bach), Richard Alston Dance Company, London

1997
Brisk Singing (Jean-Philippe Rameau), Richard Alston Dance Company, Brighton
Light Flooding Into Darkened Rooms (Denis Gautier, Jo Kondo), Richard Alston Dance Company, Brighton

1998
Red Run (Heiner Goebbels), Richard Alston Dance Company, Nottingham
Waltzes in Disorder (Brahms), Richard Alston Dance Company
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Performance Title</th>
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<td>1999</td>
<td><strong>Slow Airs Almost All of Them</strong>  (Mozart), Richard Alston Dance Company, Cambridge</td>
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<td><strong>A Sudden Exit</strong>                 (Brahms), Richard Alston Dance Company, Cambridge</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>The Signal of A Shake</strong>         (Handel), Richard Alston Dance Company, Canterbury</td>
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<td><strong>Tremor</strong>                         (Shostakovich), Richard Alston Dance Company, Cambridge</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td><strong>Water Music</strong>                   (Handel), Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td><strong>Strange Company</strong>               (Schumann), Richard Alston Dance Company, Wycombe</td>
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<td><strong>Fever</strong>                          (Monteverdi), Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td><strong>Touch and Go</strong>                  (Piazzolla), Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td><strong>Stampede</strong>                      (The Dufay Collective), Richard Alston Dance Company, Wycombe</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td><strong>Overdrive</strong>                     (Terry Riley), Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td><strong>Shimmer</strong>                       (Ravel), Richard Alston Dance Company, Canterbury</td>
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<td><strong>Gypsy Mixture</strong>                 (Re-mixed Balkan Gypsy Music - <em>Electric Gypsyland</em> / Crammed Discs), Richard Alston Dance Company, Milton Keynes</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td><strong>Volumina</strong>                      (Ligeti), Richard Alston Dance Company, Cambridge</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td><strong>Devil in the Detail</strong>           (Joplin) Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td><strong>Proverb</strong>                       (Reich) Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td><strong>Fingerprint</strong>                   (Bach) Richard Alston Dance Company, Canterbury</td>
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<td><strong>Nigredo</strong>                       (Simon Holt) Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>Shuffle It Right</strong>              (Hoagy Carmichael) Richard Alston Dance Company, Canterbury (premiere February 2008)</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>Shuffle It Right</strong>              (Hoagy Carmichael) Richard Alston Dance Company, Canterbury</td>
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<td><strong>Blow Over</strong>                     (Philip Glass) Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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<td><strong>The Men in My Life</strong>            (various) Richard Alston Dance Company, London</td>
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Movements from Petrushka (new production) (Stravinsky) Richard Alston Dance Company, Glasgow