

Richard Alston



A Level Dance Resource Pack
Teacher

Acknowledgement:

This resource pack is designed to assist teachers in the delivery of component 2 of the AQA A Level Dance specification. It features information and analysis of Richard Alston, Pulcinella and Soda Lake. Hopefully it has saved you hours of reading and research and leaves you feeling better able to deliver the content to your students. There is also a handy student guide at the back of this pack.

I would like to acknowledge that the following two publications have greatly contributed to the making of this pack and can be found at www.surrey.ac.uk/nrcd

Jones, C. Lenton, G. Roberts, H. Sanders, L. Pulcinella Resource Pack Richard Alston (1987)

King, K. Soda Lake (series editor Chapman, J.)

I hope you find the resource useful and relevant to the specification.

Thank you

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Richard Alston - Biography

Richard Alston was born on 30 October 1948 in Sussex. He was educated at Eton College and in 1965-67 studied fine arts and theatre design at Croydon College of Art.

Alston had long been interested in ballet but his interest in Robert Raushenburg, who created designs for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, led him to see this company perform. He was inspired by Cunningham's work and was soon drawn to become more involved in dance.

During the late 1960s, the period saw the early developments in contemporary dance in London, Alston took part in evening dance classes at The Place. He became one of the first full time students at London Contemporary Dance School (1967-70), training in ballet and modern dance techniques, predominantly that of Martha Graham. Alston also studied more 'alternative' styles such as Tai Chi and developed further interest in Cunningham technique and historical dance. However, it was soon clear that choreography was the direction in which he wanted to work, his first choreography being *Transit* in 1968. In 1970 he began to teach dance composition for London Contemporary Dance School and, for the next two years, created works for London Contemporary Dance Theatre.

In 1972, an award of £1000 enabled Alston along with three others to form the company Strider of which Alston was the main spokesperson. It was an experimental company which produced over sixty works in its three-year existence and brought together a number of choreographers and performers who proved to be key players of British Dance in the decades that followed.

In 1973 the company visited Dartington College of Arts where Alston met American choreographer Mary Fulkerson, a dance teacher who developed anatomical release technique. It was during this time that his style started to develop, bringing fluid and relaxed movement of released-based work to the balletic control and Cunningham-inspired use of the torso, tilts and turns. Fulkerson became one of the most influential figures to shape Alston's work.

Strider ceased in 1975 so Alston went to America to investigate dance and to study at the Merce Cunningham Studios in New York. He studied and saw a range of dance forms from George Balanchine's neo-classical ballets to postmodern performances by Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp and Lucinda Childs. He also presented a programme of his own work - *Un-American Activities* (1976) and *Edge* (1976), at the Cunningham Studios.

Following his return from the USA in 1977, Alston began to teach Cunningham-based classes and formed his own company, Richard Alston and Dancers (1978-80), and also made work for London Contemporary Dance Theatre. In 1980 he choreographed his first work for Ballet Rambert, *Bell High*, and later that year he was invited to become resident choreographer for the company. Alston held this position until 1986 when he became artistic director of the company. In 1987, under the leadership of Alston, Ballet Rambert changed its name to Rambert Dance Company to reflect the change in company style and attract an audience interested in the range of work the company was generating.

Whilst choreographing for Ballet Rambert, Alston continued to create work independently for a number of companies and dancers including Royal Danish Ballet and Michael Clark. In 1982 he also linked with Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink to co-found a new company, Second Stride. The company aimed to present and tour varied seasons of work by all three choreographers. They also aspired to work with artists from other disciplines, commissioning both composers and visual artists thus creating artistically integrated works. Alston worked with Second Stride for the company's first two seasons until, in 1983, his commitments to Ballet Rambert and his differing artistic interests brought his association with this venture to an end. Second Stride continued to present new work by Spink and Davies until 1985; thereafter the repertoire was entirely by Spink. In 1988 Davies left to set up her own company, Siobhan Davies Dance Company. Ian Spink continued to direct Second Stride until the late 1990s.

Alston's time as resident choreographer for Ballet Rambert and his work outside of the company during these years marked a period of prolific creativity. Working with Ballet Rambert meant he had a regular group of dancers, access to larger theatres, better resources, an orchestra and the ability to develop and revise dance works over time. He was also given the chance to commission both a composer and designer for *Wildlife* (1984). *Wildlife* was an important work in Alston's career as it initiated a deeper awareness of the relative and reciprocal influences to be gained from working with music and design. It is a practice which Alston has continued to pursue, becoming a significant feature in most of his works.

In 1986 Alston was appointed artistic director of Ballet Rambert. During his time as resident choreographer much of the work presented by the company had been Alston's and although he continued to create dance in his new role he also commissioned more works from other choreographers. The administrative, planning and policy-making demands of his directorship of the company ended Alston's opportunities to collaborate on a freelance basis and left him less time for choreographic output.

Alston's period as artistic director was during an economic recession, which hit ticket sales for dance badly. Thus, although creatively the company was developing and thriving, in the economic climate of the time this did not create a financially stable position. Alston's works and the repertory he had built up for the company tended to be of an abstract nature. He had an artistic vision that he was not prepared to compromise and the board of directors felt that the company repertory needed to contain work of a less abstract nature and with wider audience appeal. In December 1992, the Rambert Dance Company board members dismissed Alston.

During the period 1993-94 Alston worked on a freelance basis, both teaching and choreographing. He created dance pieces for a range of companies, including Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, London Contemporary Dance Theatre and student groups at London Contemporary Dance School and the Laban Centre. In September 1994 he formed his own company, Richard Alston Dance Company, resident at The Place Theatre. Alston was in charge of overseeing both The Place Theatre and London Contemporary Dance School.

Later, Alston moved away from the strong emphasis on design in his works that interested him whilst at Rambert Dance Company. He explains 'I am really interested in developing further the close relationship between movement and music'. It is music which is the deepest source for Alston, and it is the way in which he corresponds the music and movement in his choreography which is his most engaging for the viewer.

London Contemporary Dance School

London contemporary Dance school and its partner London Contemporary Dance Theatre were founded in 1966 by Robin Howard under the governance of the Contemporary Dance Trust. Howard opened the school to train new dancers for his company. It was at this point that Alston started to choreograph, as he studied under the groundbreaking teaching of Robert Cohan and the leadership of Robin Howard, who first brought contemporary dance to the UK from America in the late 1950s.

Strider

Formed in 1972 it was no surprise that a company such as Strider emerged from London Contemporary Dance School, being a hot spot of artistic research. The independent company was the first to be recognized by funding bodies in Britain. Strider was a democratic company in which all the performers choreographed work for the repertoire. The

company experimented 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, the Serpentine Gallery in London, and the Museum of Modern Arts in Oxford. His work at this time explored the compositional ideas developed by Merce Cunningham and John Cage with their emphasis on chance procedures and the unexpected.

Second Stride

In 1982 Alston also linked with Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink to co-found a new company, Second Stride. The company aims to present and tour varied seasons of work by all three choreographers. They also aspired to work with artists from other disciplines, commissioning both composers and visual artists thus creating artistically integrated works. Alston worked with Second Stride for the company's first two seasons until, in 1983, his commitments to Ballet Rambert and his differing artistic interests brought his association with this venture to an end. Second Stride continued to present new work by Spink and Davies until 1985; thereafter the repertoire was entirely by Spink. In 1988 Davies left to set up her own company, Siobhan Davies Dance Company. Ian Spink continued to direct Second Stride on his own.

Richard Alston Dance Company

In September 1994 he formed his own company, Richard Alston Dance Company, resident at The Place Theatre. At this point Alston was in charge of overseeing both The Place Theatre and London Contemporary Dance School. Later, Alston moved away from the strong emphasis on design in his works that interested him whilst at Rambert Dance Company.

Currently the company consists of ten dancers who take classes in both classical and contemporary dance. Often, Alston appoints apprentice dancers from London Contemporary Dance School. Works by the company date back to 1968 however the current season of 2015/16 comprises of *Rejoice in the Lamb*, *Stronhold*, *Brisk Singing*, *An Italian in Madrid* and *Mazur*.

Essential Alston is the education programme hosted by the company which aims to assist teachers and students in the learning of his work.

The Place

Start-up:

Robin Howard sold many of his possessions to buy the premises to ensure that modern dance could always evolve and be renewed by the outstanding talent of the dancers being trained in Britain. The Place is a dance and performance centre in the London borough of Camden – originally the home base of the London Contemporary Dance Theatre from the 1970s. It is now the location of the London Contemporary Dance School and the Robin Howard Dance Theatre. Virtually all of the major British contemporary dance artists to have emerged in the past 40 years have been associated with The Place at some stage in their careers, and its contribution to the popularity of contemporary dance in Britain today is hard to overstate. The Place's work today continues to focus on developing dance artists at different stages of their careers. The Place's Robin Howard Dance Theatre, so named in honor of their founder in 2001, premieres more dance works than any other venue in the country. It is seen as a hotbed of experimentation, where

emerging dancers and dance makers from the UK and abroad first come to national attention, while more established artists use the space to develop and show experimental works.

Training:

Among work less visible to the general public, London Contemporary Dance School is recognized as one of the world's leading dance conservatoires, providing full-time vocational training to around 170 students to degree and postgraduate level. Through founding in 2001 with RADA the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, London Contemporary Dance School became the first dance school to provide funding for its students which compares to that for students of other disciplines in the UK.

Community:

The Place also organizes community work to address the needs of local people, including those who are disadvantaged or may feel excluded, and runs a popular programme of evening and weekend classes where enthusiasts of all ages and abilities have the chance to learn from some of the art forms most accomplished practitioners.

Richard Alston - Influences

Frederick Ashton

- Richard Alston became interested in dance through Ballet, in particular the work of Frederick Ashton.
- Ashton was born in 1904 and passed in 1988.
- He was the founding choreographer of the Royal Ballet where he became one of the most influential dance figures of the 20th century.
- Today the Royal Ballet continue to perform some of his most notable works such as *La Fille mal Gardee*, *Marguerite*, *Armand* and *Symphonic Variations*.
- Ashton made his choreographic debut for Marie Rambert in 1926.

Ashton's stylistic features:

- The epaulement (the way the head and shoulders are held)
- Fleet footwork
- Elegance
- Technically demanding content
- Mime and balletic vocabulary

Robin Howard

- He was the grandson of prime minister Stanley Baldwin.
- Educated at Eton.
- Served in WW2 where he lost both legs.
- Trained as a lawyer but never practiced.

- Worked in the hotel and restaurant business.
- Helped refugees via United Nations.
- 1954 he saw the Martha Graham Company perform in London and realised that's what was missing from the British dance scene.
- He convinced Marie Rambert, Martha Graham and others to become patrons of his 'Contemporary Ballet Trust LTD'.
- He set up The Place and invited Robert Cohan to become the first artistic director.
- He sold his own land and possessions to purchase the whole building and devoted his life to The Place until his death in 1989.

Robert Cohan

- Born in 1925 in New York.
- Trained at the Martha Graham School.
- Joined the Martha Graham Company in 1946.
- Left in 1957 to start his own company.
- Returned in 1962 for its European tour.
- Became co-director of the Martha Graham Company with Bertram Ross.
- In 1967 Robin Howard invited him to become the first artistic director of the Contemporary Dance Trust making him director of The Place, London Contemporary Dance School and London Contemporary Dance Theatre- which he directed for the next 20 years.
- Cohan and Howard encouraged home grown talent such as Richard Alston, Siobhan Davies and Robert North.

Merce Cunningham

- American choreographer and dancer (1919 – 2009)
- Known for his collaboration with Avant Garde composer and life partner John Cage.
- A member of the Martha Graham Company before going on to create his own works.
- Most innovative and influential choreographer of the 20th Century.
- Studied fine arts.
- Studied with Maude Barrett, a vaudevillian.
- Cunningham challenged modern dance in the late 1950's
- Innovator of the chance method
- Cunningham developed his own unique style

Features of Cunningham's style:

- ❖ Created pieces separate from the music.
- ❖ 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 work
- ❖ Movement and music would only come together during performance.

- ❖ He incorporated the chance method into his choreography using dice and 'The I Ching' to determine how the dancer should move.
 - ❖ In the 1990s he used a computer program as a new choreographic approach.
- Alston was introduced to Cunningham's work in the late 1960s when he was still studying fine arts.
 - Later 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 London Contemporary Dance School – it was here he found a way of moving which suited him in both body and mind.

Fine art

In European academic traditions, fine art is art developed primarily for aesthetics or beauty, distinguishing it from applied art that also has to serve some practical function. Historically, the five main fine arts were painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, with performing arts including theatre and dance. Today, the fine arts commonly include additional forms, such as film, photography, video production/editing, design, sequential art, conceptual art, and printmaking. However, in some institutes of learning or in museums, fine art and frequently the term fine arts as well, are associated exclusively with visual art forms.

America

In 1975 he left for New York in an attempt to seek out new ways in which dance development was taking shape. America was at the forefront of new initiatives and was home to some of the most innovative emerging artists of the time. It was at this point he trained at the Merce Cunningham Dance Studio and on his return two years later he worked throughout the UK and Europe as an independent choreographer and teacher of Cunningham technique.

Richard Alston - Choreographic Approach

- In Alston's early work he focused on abstract, movement-based themes
- By the time *Second Stride* was active, although still using formalist and abstract themes, Alston's work seems to have developed a more allusive character, hinting at underlying emotions or narratives.
- Opportunities for exploring design as an integral part of the choreography were introduced during his years at Ballet Rambert/Rambert Dance Company
- Much of Alston's early work is danced to silence, such as *Soda Lake*, although later music began to play an important part. His 21st century work is primarily focused on the dance/music interface.
- Other choreographers and their works of the past seem to be significant e.g. Merce Cunningham, Mary Fulkerson and Frederick Ashton.

Typical Dynamic Qualities

- An increasing tendency towards softness in tension is evident over time.
- Balletic control and a sense of ease.
- Influence of music and dancers (he often draws upon dancer's individual qualities).

Typical range of vocabulary

- An eclectic range of vocabulary
- Neat classical footwork
- Nuances
- Dancers are allowed to make movement suggestions
- Complex co-ordinations of the torso
- Complex gestures
- Use of design

Typical structuring methods

- Fragmentation and discontinuity
- Engaging the intellect rather than inducing the passive empathetic emotions
- Early work did not depend on music for its structure
- Use of breath rhythm
- Musical structures became increasingly important
- The mood of the music is allowed to colour his choreography
- The dancers themselves continue to be a significant starting point. Alston often revisits and revises past dances

Design

In 1994 Alston moved away from the strong emphasis on design in his works that interested him whilst at Rambert Dance Company.

Alston and Ballet Rambert/ Rambert Dance Company

1980	Choreographed his first work <i>Ball High</i> for Ballet Rambert.
1980-1986	He became resident choreographer
1986	He became artistic director where he produced many works.
1987	Ballet Rambert changed its name to Rambert Dance Company in order to reflect the change which was occurring – mainly because of Alston's influence and creative input.
1987	<p>This was a prolific time of change for Dance in Britain. Alston was evolving and experimenting with music and design in a way which reformed the way dance was perceived by viewers.</p> <p>The only problem was that this was all happening during a time of economic crisis and ticket sales for dance were crippling low.</p> <p>The board of directors insisted that Alston create works that were less abstract and to make works that had been tried and tested (narrative) just to sell tickets.</p>
1992	The board dismissed Alston following his refusal to compromise his artistic vision.

Works by Alston created for Ballet Rambert/ Rambert Dance Company

Title	Year
Apollo Distraught	27/07/82
Cat's Eye	12/06/01
Cinema	02/03/89
Dangerous Liaisons	30/04/85
Dealing with Shadows	14/03/90
Dutiful Ducks	10/10/86
Fantasia	27/07/82
Hymnos	17/03/88
Java	26/07/85
Landscape	11/07/80
Mythologies	13/03/85
Pulaw Dewata	21/06/89
Pulcinella	13/01/87
Rainbow Ripples	21/1/80
Rhapsody in Blue	03/03/88
Roughcut	07/12/90
Unrest	20/06/01
Voices and Light Footsteps	27/03/84
Wildlife	17/05/84
Zanza	30/05/86

Pulcinella (1987)

Set work 1

**Choreographed for Rambert Dance Company by
Richard Alston**

Pulcinella (1987)

This section of the pack is designed to cover some of the specific headings set out by AQA. The thought process behind the content is to give teachers a detailed overview of the work and an understanding of where it sits in relation to the choreographer's career and genre.

The origins of the work (Massine)

The original Pulcinella was created for the Ballet Russes in 1920, the ultimate ballet company founded and directed by Sergei Diaghilev, a Russian impresario. It was the great Leonide Massine who choreographed the piece and typical to Massine's style Pulcinella featured characters and a storyline. In his characterisation Massine presented Pulcinella as a typical Neapolitan extrovert and a rogue. To add to this, he also used ballet steps, commedia dell'arte gestures and folk steps. The music was composed by Igor Stravinsky and the set design by Pablo Picasso. These collaborators became historical figures amongst the art world over time.

Richard Alston's Version of Pulcinella (1987)

Starting Points for the work

- Massine's 1920 production for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes
- Stravinsky's music for the ballet
- Created especially for Ballet Rambert

Style of the piece

- Abstract and narrative
- Neo-classical
- Formalism and expressionism
- Collaborative venture with designer
- Total theatre – music, dance, design integrated (like Diaghilev's model)
- Classical model overlain with contemporary style – use of ensemble, similar material shared between men/woman, soloists integrated into ensemble much of the time, mix of contemporary and ballet vocabulary and use of naturalistic gestures/mime.
- Uses pastiche (A pastiche is a work of visual art, literature, theatre, or music that imitates the style or character of the work of one or more other artists)

Richard Alston and Howard Hodgkin

Richard Alston and Howard Hodgkin (an artist) first collaborated in 1981 creating *Night music* (1981) for Ballet Rambert using Hodgkin's first designs for the theatre. Following this they really wanted to stage Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* but due to lack of funds this meant that this idea didn't materialise for several years since it needed an orchestra and set design.

In 1986 Opera North staged a double bill of Stravinsky music – one opera and one dance piece. The company asked Hodgkin to design *Le Sacre Du Printemps*, but he wanted to work with Alston therefore Hodgkin suggested *Pulcinella*. The dance had its premiere alongside Stravinsky's *Oedipus* on 13th January 1987 at the Grand Theatre, Leeds. *Pulcinella* then entered Rambert's repertoire and received its London premiere on 15th May 1987. It was paired with Glen Tetley's *Pierrot Lunaire*, another work based on the commedia dell'arte, which also requires singers and a large orchestra (Tetley was most known for his seamless integration of ballet and modern dance).

Alston made some changes to the work during 1987 for example he dropped the number of friends/neighbours from the original four couples to three couples, therefore the number of fake *Pulcinella* also dropped from four to three. He also added a reconciliation duet for *Pulcinella* and *Pimpinella*.

Pulcinella was last performed in 1988 by the Rambert Dance Company. That same year Bob Lockyer filmed it for BBC2 Dance makers' series, and the filmed version was broadcast on 22 October 1988.

Creative Team

Choreography: Richard Alston

Music: Igor Stravinsky after Giambattista Pergolesi (1920)

Design: Howard Hodgkin

Lighting: Peter Mumford

First Performance: 13 January 1987, Grand Theatre Leeds (in collaboration with Opera North)

Cast

Pulcinella – Ben Craft

Pimpinella – Catherine Price

Caviello – Mark Baldwin

Cinzio – Robert Poole

Florindo – Michael Hodges

Rosetta – Diane Walker

Isabella – Sara Matthews

Prudenza – Frances Carty

Friends, neighbours – Lucy Bethune, Mary Evelyn, Sue Hawksley, Elizabeth Old, Christopher Carney, Paul Old, Bruce Michelson, Jeremy James

Singers – Della Jones, Mark Tucker, John Tranter

Filmed Work (from credits)

Choreography: Richard Alston

Design: Howard Hodgkin

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Lighting: Peter Mumford

Director: Bob Lockyer

First Broadcast: 22 October 1988, BBC2, Dance makers' series

Synopsis

The characters in this work are from the traditional commedia dell'arte. Set in Naples, Rosetta, Isabella and Prudenza are bored with their lovers and switch their eye to a good looking rogue, Pulcinella. Pimpinella, Pulcinella's wife, becomes irritated by her husband's response to this attention from the opposite sex. Caviello, Cinzio and Florindo, the lovers of the three girls become equally irritated by their behaviour and threaten Pulcinella but Pimpinella and her friends see them off.

That night the three men catch Pulcinella on his way to the girl's house and they beat him up. The quick witted Pulcinella, able to see no other means of escape, keels over and 'dies' to his assailants astonishment. Feeling guilty and appalled at what they think they have done they sneak off. Moments later the three young woman are distraught as they find pulcinella's 'corpse' – especially when the 'corpse' disappears.

To teach the young girls a lesson for flirting with her husband she persuades her friends to disguise themselves as Pulcinella's. Of course, the woman are terrified and their boyfriends dumbfounded, thinking that they are seeing ghosts.

When the fake Pulcinella's reveal themselves and the real Pulcinella appears, all is cleared up. The three woman ask forgiveness of their lovers, and everyone celebrates.

Subject matter and treatment

Alston felt it important to recognise tradition but also to try new things underlining his treatment of the work. Firstly, it is in-keeping with the original music by Stravinsky. Secondly, the original 1920s version (Massine) looks at the older commedia dell'arte traditions within its plot attempting to modernise ballet and to include Diaghilevs integrated approach to music, design and movement. Alston continues this and he too sees the important of each feature within the work. He provides a 'fresh look' at the traditions of the past and collaborates closely with Howard Hodgkin. Thirdly

Alston pays homage to the genre of ballet and allows himself to be influenced by other ballet styles. Alston's choice of treatment also allowed him to indulge in his own characteristically musical and Cunningham influenced, contemporary style. Both narrative and abstract can be found within Alston's Pulcinella where Cunningham's approach can be seen in the relationship between the music and movement. Keeping in line with commedia's reliance upon audiences recognising the stock characters through their different postures, gestures and costumes Alston decided to alter each dancer's movement only slightly rather than create an individual vocabulary for each character. Finally, Alston uses a general combination of steps which he distributes to each dancer, certain variations of these become associated with particular characters – this is done in a very understated manner. Typical of Alston he establishes a simple movement theme and then develops it, often to a level of sophisticated complexity however in the early days he would develop it using character, formation or a fusion of styles and genres.

Treatment summary:

- Folk dance
- Contemporary dance
- Classical ballet
- Commedia dell'arte
- Cunningham style
- Humour
- Use of physical design
- Use of spatial design
- Musical relationships
- Linear and curved lines are mixed together
- Styles are fused
- Uses original music
- Development of simple movement themes

Form

The dance is in three parts distinguished by changes in the back cloth. These three parts relate to the musical structure of the work. In general, it alternates between narrative episodes and more formal, abstract dances. Like the start of the classical Pulcinella it opens with the overture. This was done to maintain connections with classical ballet and to give the viewers of the video the sense that they were in the theatre watching it live – an unusual yet not unknown way to start a contemporary dance piece.

Constituent features

An easy way to remember the constituent features is DPAM or DDPAM

- D on't (devices)
- D ouble (dancers)
- P irouette (physical setting)
- A fter (aural setting)
- M idnight (movement – action/space/dynamics)

Dancers

Cast size – 16 (plus 3 singers)

Female – 8

Male – 8

(see cast list for roles)

Physical Setting

Set design:

Visual artist Howard Hodgkin designed both the set and costumes for *Pulcinella*. As the work premiered during Ballet Rambert's diamond jubilee season in 1987, Hodgkin was also commissioned to design three posters for the company. One of the posters included an Italian flag, as seen in the set design of *Pulcinella*, and another contained a mask like those worn in *Pulcinella*.

The set designs in *Pulcinella* consist of one front cloth and three back cloths. The designs feature Hodgkin's trademark of vivid colours and abstracted representations of objects. The only two colours to appear on each of the four cloths are red and white. Red and white are the two colours mostly associated in the costumes of *Pulcinella* and *Pimpinella*. Blue is seen in the first three cloths, but not in that for part three, which marks the first time that black appears in the set design.

The designs evoke Naples and the exuberance of the *Commedia dell'arte*. The glowing colours create just the right amount of 'carnival' atmosphere. Hodgkin was familiar with Naples and had in fact painted many paintings yet his designs do not directly draw upon these paintings. Alston has said that the designs are in keeping with the spirit of the music. The colour of the cloths reflects the vitality of the score.

Hodgkin's front cloth in bright blue, red, orange, green and white is displayed while the musical overture is played – this is the painting seen during the opening credits. Hodgkin's most abstract design for *Pulcinella*, this cloth is difficult to interpret. The two strokes of red near the centre of the painting could be 'read' as a heart – alerting the audience to the story's theme of love.

At the centre of the backcloth for part one are stacked rectangles – some complete, some partial. The rectangles, in off white and shades of brown, each have a red border. The design suggests the sea port of Naples, the home town of the *Commedia dell'arte* character *Pulcinella*. The rectangles can be seen as maritime flags flying over the blue sea, or as bricks of the buildings surrounding the town square, with the blue sky above. Even without literal interpretations, the backdrops suggest an outdoor space where people will meet.

The cloth of part two clearly represents the moon shining out at night. Made up of one curve each of blue, red and white, this is a huge bloodshot moon in a deep blue sky. Its shine is heightened in certain sections of part two by the lighting (designed by Peter Mumford).

The Italian flag is the motif of third backdrop, again reminding the audience that the story takes place in Italy. Several flags, some more complex than others, overlap around the cloth on a background of pink; they are interspersed with an arc of orange and green (recalling the front cloth) and a black rectangle that mirrors those in the dancers' costumes. This collage of shapes and bright colours underscores the cheerful, festive mood of part three.

Costume:

The costumes for Pulcinella are simple and allow for ease of movement. The women wear dresses with close fitting bodices, wide shoulder straps, and free flowing skirts, which fall below the knee. The men wear loose-fitting V-neck shirts and loose, knee length trousers, which allude to those worn by Pulcinella in the Commedia dell'arte. While his traditional Commedia dell'arte costume includes a half mask worn throughout the play, in Hodgkin's Pulcinella, masks only appear in part two, when they are worn by the men as a disguise.

All dancers wear tights and flat ballet slippers. Alston's work holds slight reference to August Bournonville's ballets where the men would wear white tights and black shoes throughout.

The characters are grouped by the colour of their costumes, which interact with the colour palettes of the sets. Pulcinella and Pimpinella are in white, the traditional colour for their character. Modern audience may acknowledge the irony that the roguish Pulcinella is dressed in a colour which suggests purity and innocence. In part two as he seeks to make his move on Rosetta, Isabella and Prudenza he is wrapped in a cloak of red – the colour of passion. As the scene develops it becomes the scene of bloodshed as he is battered, covered in the cloak and left for dead.

Red also features in Pimpinella's costume as the shoulder straps on her dress are red. In this instance red connotes the colour of anger – understandably so for a woman in her position. Later, her costume changes to a dress with black straps showing that she has forgiven him and his straying ways – her anger has dissipated.

In part one and two Rosetta, Isabella and Prudenza are dressed individually in blue, green and purple. Their boyfriends wear black shirts and trousers in the same colour of their partners but in a slightly different hue. In part two the woman also wears black shawls, which become mourning clothes after they discover the 'dead' pulcinella. When the reconciled lovers appear in part three, their costumes are dappled rather than in solid colours. The women have renounced their earlier colours and are dressed individually in orange, red, pink – all with black patches. The men retain their black shirts, but their trousers are combinations of black, green, red and blue patches.

Pimpinella's six friends are colour co-ordinated as a group in part one, where they are in varying muted shades of brown and off white, which pick up those in the backdrop. In part two the three men pretending to be Pulcinella's ghosts are dressed exactly like him, and the white costumes chime with their ghostly appearance. With the celebratory mood of part three the women take the stage in colourful costumes, dressed individually in yellow, blue, maroon and purple – all with black patches. The men reappear in their black shirts from the first part, with their white trousers of the second part now dappled with black.

It is interesting to speculate on the use of so much black in a scene that is meant to be joyous. All the women now wear black tights and shoes (whereas earlier these had toned with the colour of their dresses) and black underskirts. It could be interpreted that Hodgkin is highlighting the light and the dark, the good and the bad. He may also be reminding the viewers that the characters have been through a dark episode of jealousy, betrayal and a beating. Pulcinella is the only character who retains his original costume – he has not changed his colours despite all that has happened.

Aural setting

In embarking on the score, Stravinsky's first task was to select the pieces that were appropriate for dancing and underpinned the ballets scenario. While making his selection, the composer found that eighteenth century music is in one

sense, all dance music. The pieces chosen underscored the mood of a scene in Massine's ballet and moved along the action.

Other pieces in *Pulcinella* were by Domenico Gallo, Count Unico Wilhelm Van Wassenaer, Alessandro Parisotti and Carlo Ignazio Monza.

In Massine's Version of the work *Pulcinella*'s first entrance sees him playing the violin as he danced. Just like Alston and Hodgkin, Stravinsky chose to acknowledge the *Commedia dell'arte* origins of the work. The trombone and double bass in section 21 carry out a slapstick duet, ripe with humour. In Alston's 1987 version the dancer playing *Pulcinella* seems to allude to the pot-belly of the *Commedia dell'arte*'s *Pulcinella* as he traces his arms in an arc over his torso.

A typical device used in Stravinsky's work which appears in *Pulcinella*, is the *ostinato*, meaning 'obstinate' or 'persistent', the *ostinato* is a phrase or chord repeated, exactly, several times in a row. The driving and insistent chord at the end of *Pulcinella*'s *allegro* (section 4) and *Allegro assai* (section 8). In music of the 18th century, the *ostinato* chords would resolve into the expected harmonies, whereas in *Pulcinella* they often continue on regardless of the expected harmony, not yielding to the demands of harmonic progression. This disruption gives a static feel to the harmonic structure.

Movement

Stylistic Features of *Pulcinella* (1987)

- Contemporary dance steps
- Cunningham influenced use of the torso
- Naturalistic, Italian, Vernacular hand gestures
- The ensemble as an important part of the action and not deployed like a traditional corps de ballet
- Individuality of the contemporary dancers
- Soloist roles that are treated in a complex manner – highlighted by their stage placement, costume and individual dance material
- Strong essence of Sir Frederick Ashton's work
- A link to the style of Enrico Cecchetti (who taught both Massine and Ashton)
- References to the work of Vaslav Nijinsky and Bronislava Nijinsky (a link to *Ballet Russes*)
- Influences of Romantic Ballet

Key Movements of *Pulcinella* (1987)

- Alston uses dance and mime
- Use of the torso: curving, contracting, bending, tilting, leaning, rippling, upright, epaulement, twisting, hip isolations and shoulder isolations.
- Adage: supporting and lifting of partner by the men, arabesques of various kinds, attitudes, leg extensions and lifts, rocking actions, balances and counter pulling actions.

- Petit and Grand Allegro: tipped over runs, petit jetes, petits battements, leaps of various types, glissades, sauté, changements, entrechat, pas de chat, coupes, hops in first arabesque, brise, assembles, pirouettes, balonne, gallops, ordinary runs and walks and demi-pointe walks.
- Arm gestures: folded arms, hands on hips, arabesque or attitude arms, diagonal and other linear arm designs, curved arm designs, balletic arms in general, holding hands, range of mimetic actions from classical ballet and Italian vernacular gestures.
- Leg gestures: rond de jambe of various kinds, kicks, developpes, various standing postures with the ball of the foot placed across the instep or out to one side, reverence, pique actions, flexed feet, fouette actions, rises, demi-pointe walks, lunges, fondu, retires, circling in and out rotations of the knee.

Structural and Narrative Overview of Pulcinella (1987)

The purpose of this table is to allow teachers and students to obtain an overview of the work. It breaks the work up into three sections and guides the reader through a loose narrative, identifying specific characters as it develops.

Part	Section	Section Name	Narrative
		Overture	Overture
1	1	Serenata Larghetto	Pulcinella flirts with Rosetta, Isabella and Prudenza.
	2	Scherzino Allegro	Dance of the friends and neighbours.
	3	Piu vivo	Pimpinella tells of Pulcinella.
	4	Allegro	Woman frustrated with their men.
	5	Andantino	Pimpinella confronts Pulcinella about his flirtatious actions. He declares his true love for her.
	6	Allegro	Dance of the friends and neighbours.
	7	Ancora poco mento	Rosetta, Isabella and Pridenza vie for Pucinella's attention.
	8	Allegro assai	Caviello, Cinzio and Florindo enter and attack Pulcinella. Pimpinella and the friends and neighbours come to his defence.
2	9	Allegro (alla breve)	Pulcinella in disguise is attacked by Caviello, Cinzio and Florindo. He fakes his own death.
	10	Andante	

	11	Allegro	The men cover him and creep off. The woman enter and mourn Pulcinella's death. Their men reappear and confront them. Pulcinella creeps off at the end.
	12	Presto	The lovers are frightened over the disappearance of Pulcinella's body.
	13	Larghetto	They are tormented by three fake Pulcinellas.
	14	Allegro – alla breve	The fake Pulcinellas walk around the cowering lovers and then reveal their true identity.
	15	Tarantella	Accusation by Pimpinella and the friends. Pulcinella appears at the end.
	16	Andantino	Solo by Pulcinella, joined by Pimpinella and later by the friends and neighbours. The men remorseful, ask for forgiveness of their woman.
3	17	Allegro	Pimpinella solo
	18	Gavotta con due variazioni – Allegro Moderato	Pimpinella tells Pulcinella off about all of his antics; he declares his true love, again.
	19	Variazione Ia – Allegretto	Pimpinella and Pulcinella duet.
	20	Variazione IIa – Allegro piu tosto moderato	Shaking hands and forgiveness all round. Dance by the six lovers.
	21	Vivo	Trio by Pulcinella and two male friends.
	22	Tempo di minuetto Molto moderato	Dance by all the woman. Joined by Caviello, Cinzio and Florindo.
	23	Allegro assai	Finale, all dance.

Looking at action, gesture, dynamics and mood

The purpose of the next table is to enable teachers and students to identify specific moments within the choreography in relation to the narrative.

	Characters	Action	Gesture	Dynamic	Mood
Part 1	Rosetta Caviello Pulcinella Cinzio Prudenza Friends and neighbours Isabella Florindo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caressing - Walking and circling - Plique actions of the left foot - Folded arms - Glissades - Swings and rocking motions - Lying down - Extensions - Balances - Turns - Contact - Lifts - Pas de chat - Ballonne - Leaps - Rond de jambe - Extensions of the arms and legs - Bending of legs, arms and torso - Use of toe and heel - Step and click behind - Arabesque - Running steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kissing of hand - Love gesture to chest - Looks/glances - Pointing - Pushing - Kicking - Shaking finger - Open arms gesture - 'go away' - 'not now' - 'be quiet' - Arms on waist - Arms folded - Blowing kisses - Tapping of forehead - Punching of arms - Snapping of fingers - Hands covering head 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smooth - Aggressive - Sharp - Staccato - Gentle - Crisp - Forceful - Impulsive - Accentuated - Heavy - Slow - Harsh - direct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Friction - Dreamy - Serene - Tense - Lively - Angry - Agitated - Impatient - Mocking - Harmonious - Peaceful - Vengeful
Part 2	Pulcinella Two pairs of lovers Rosetta Isabella Prudenza Caviello Cinzio Florindo Three Pulcinellas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walking - Balancing - Lunging - Supporting - Static poses - Running - Creeping - Step hops - Gallops - Turns - Leaps - Curving of torso - Shaking of legs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hiding - Looking around - Thumb gesture - Punches - Kicks - Pushing - Comforting - Clenched fists - Hiding faces - Use of heel - Lifting of mask - Pointing finger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agitated - Sharp - Staccato - Accentuated - Smooth - Slow - Heavy - Impulsive - Sprightly - Flowing - Gentle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anxious - Aggressive - Mocking glee - Guilty - Peaceful - Grieving - Despair - Fear - Intimidating - Sinister - Lively

	Friends and neighbours Pimpinella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arabesque - Rises - Leg extensions - Rocking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palms inverted on the waist - Hanging head - Stroking of face - Hugging 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remorseful
Part 3	Pimpinella Pulcinella Rosetta Caviello Isabella Cinzio Prudenza Florinda All (at the end)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Running - Leaping - Assembles - Brises - Step temps leves - Turns - Pas de chat - Walking - Glissades - Balances - Pirouettes - Developee kicks - Turning gleaps - Rond de jambe - Curves/tilts - Plies through second into balance - Step fouette - Lunges - Rocking motion - Circling arms - Hip thrusts - Use of flexed foot - Body ripples - Balance with attitude leg - Repetition and reference to movements used in the lively sections of the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hands on waist - Hands behind back - Arms folded - Kissing - Pushing away with arms - Shrugging of shoulders - Smiling - Patting of heart - Caressing - Slapping of face - Punching - Hug/pushing away - Shaking of hands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharp - Precise - Sprightly - Accentuated - Soft - Animated - Smooth - Gentle - Impulsive - Bright - Alert 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bright - Cheerful - Moody - Temperamental - Mocking - Upset - Disturbed - Mocking - Coy - Happy - Joyful - Serene - Coarse - Aristocratic - Celebratory

Abstract Moments

- Rosetta performs contrasting movement to that of Carvellio's lyrical execution.
- During the scene with Pulcinella, Rosetta and Isabella we see integration of abstract and narrative aspects. This is largely shown through a mixture of mime and balletic vocabulary. This was also a characteristic feature of Sir Frederick Ashton in narrative ballets such as *The Dream*, 1964.

- As Rosetta and Pulcinella perform a lyrical duet he kisses and caresses her before travelling away from her in time to step into demi-pointe with Isabella – matching her position. This repetition of the structural relationship portrays pulcinella's fickleness in an abstract manner
- The back cloth during Scherzino is complemented with the design of the dancers who are arranged in a 'T' shape formation to reflect the angles and the lines of the back cloth. Later we see this repeated through linear arm designs.
- Tilted torso – new to the style of the company showcasing stylistic features of Cunningham (of whom Alston is heavily influenced by).
- Pedestrianised action content such as walking, running and gesture. What made this stand out as slightly more abstract was Alston's treatment of them as he would repeat and develop them at various points throughout the work, contributing to the design of the work.
- Pimpinella and Pulcinella perform a combination of classical mime with semi-abstract dance material. These abstract movements have been used previously but as he develops the work they obtain the narrative treatment. Alston's ability to add or subtract narrative qualities to or from an action is evident and significant in this work.
- The use of cabriole and l'air carry the mood of the moment/scene.
- During the opening scene the response of Pulcinella adds to the comic aspect since sometimes action-reaction is used and at other times it is not. Through this moment there is a strong use of abstract dance steps for example after they have thrown him forwards in the somersault the boyfriends creep towards him using a brise and a double pirouette.
- Some characterisations are not exaggerated but are achieved by abstract means challenging the audience to interpret their meanings – something that later cost Alston his role with Rambert Dance Company.

Soda Lake (1981)
Set Work 2

Choreographed by Richard Alston and
Performed by Ballet Rambert

Soda Lake (1981)

The origins of the work

Soda Lake was originally created for a BBC television programme but, when that project didn't come together the work was instead made for the stage. The first time it was presented was after a Rambert workshop evening at Riverside studios, London, danced by Michael Clark. Alston's training and passion for art meant he was impressed by Nigel Hall's sculpture entitled Soda Lake which he had seen at the Warwick Gallery, London.

The sculpture became the 'set' for a solo dance; this generated images in the choreography, both to do with the metal pieces themselves in the space and with the Nevada desert theme.

At the first performance the original sculpture was used but later a replica was made for performances by Ballet Rambert.

The dance was originally to have been choreographed to music and Nigel Osbourne, a frequent collaborator with Alston in later works, was asked to write the score. Osbourne thought that the music would distract from the dance so rejected the offer, saying that the dance would be more effective in silence.

Despite a number of dancers performing the work including Michael Clark and Mark Baldwin, Alston only ever allowed a few dances to do it. He was specific about how he wanted it danced, about the quality and breadth of the movement therefore required dancers who possessed a specific skills set.

Starting points for the work

The Sculpture

The sculpture 'Soda Lake' was created in 1968. It was inspired by a dry lake of the same name located in the Mojave Desert, a large arid area stretching from California to Nevada in the Western United States of America. The sculpture had been shown in a number of one man shows and Alston recalls seeing it at one such exhibition where he envisaged the possibility of using the tubular construction as a design component in a future work. Having a background in fine art enabled Alston to recognise the qualities of the artwork and to use and enhance them through dance resulting in the creation of Soda Lake.

Character and Subject Matter

Soda Lake is a short, one act, non-narrative, solo dance. It is a British Contemporary dance work of the early 1980s. It shows elements of American influences in terms of the technique, and fuses a mixture of movement vocabulary and qualities unique to Richard Alston.

The subject matter of the dance is the inspiration for its design, a dry lake in the Mojave Desert, as well as the qualities of the sculpture, particularly the way in which it creates and defines space. The qualities of the dance are concerned primarily with elements of space and distance.

The Significance of the Dance

The absence of sound and multiple dancers means that the focus must be centred around the soloist and the sculpture. The relationship between the dancer and design is significant from the very start. The tension between the dancer and sculpture at the very start developed into a variation of spatial designs with the sculpture becoming almost magnetic. At times the dancer becomes a part of the sculpture as he moves through and underneath it and at other times he echoes the lines and form of the sculpture.

Alston investigates in depth the shape and paths of the sculpture in the movements he creates for the dancer. He echoes the bold black vertical pole with a recurrent movement in which the dancer stands, feet together, on the half toe, with introverted focus, lifts and stretches torso and arm to create a straight vertical line with his body which, as a result, appears to be hanging like the pole.

The finer angled pole is also echoed as the dancer's torso is frequently held at a complimentary or identical angle. The fusion of horizontal and vertical lines echoes the horizontal loop at its summit, something Alston achieved through his interest and exploration of spatial design and use of the body.

Finally, in keeping with Hall's suggestion that his sculpture is not a fixed dimension but rather an extension beyond its self through shape and direction is significant in the relationship between both the dance and sculpture and the dancer and sculpture.

The Creative Team

Choreographer – Richard Alston

Designer – Nigel Hall

Lighting – Charles Balfour

Rambert Premiere

Date – 4 February 1986

Venue – Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester

Dancer – Mark Baldwin

Constituent features

Dancers

Soda Lake is created for one dancer who is trained in contemporary technique. The dance was originally created for a male dancer but later the role has been performed by either male or female performers.

Michael Clark

<p>Michael Clark's first dance experience was in Highland dancing where he studied from an early age in his native Scotland. During this period of study, he danced with the Scottish Ballet and appeared in a number of productions such as <i>The Nutcracker</i>. At the age of 13 he joined the Royal Ballet School where his potential as a ballet dancer was recognised. His Cecchetti teacher Richard Glasstone became one of his biggest influences both as a dancer and</p>

choreographer. Clark left the Royal Ballet School at the age of 17 before formally completing his training and attended a choreography programme initiated by Glen Tetley. After a brief period with Ballet Rambert where he developed his modern dance technique, primarily through his association with Richard Alston, Clark then travelled to America to study Cunningham technique. Upon his return he worked with Mary Fulkerson and Ian Spink (both having a professional connection to Alston). Clark established himself as an independent choreographer and dancer where he used his eclectic technique to create works that were both exciting and shocking.

Mark Baldwin (Rambert Dance Company)

Born in Fiji in 1954 but a New Zealand national, Baldwin trained in Ballet from the age of 19 and graduated from Auckland University with a degree in fine arts. In the summer of 1979 he performed in *The Tempest* with Ballet Rambert before going to dance with and choreograph for Australian Dance Theatre. Baldwin re-joined Ballet Rambert in September 1983. From there he danced a number of works by choreographers Christopher Bruce, Glen Tetley and Siobhan Davies. Baldwin has danced in a number of Alston's most significant works including *Pulcinella* and *Wildlife*. He has also choreographed works for Rambert's Choreographic workshop seasons including *October Mountain*.

Physical setting/design

Soda Lake is performed above and around a two-part sculpture. One part is a thin metal pole which stretches up at an angle and has a large elliptical loop attached at its apex. The second part is a thicker pole which is hung diametrically opposite the point at which the loop is attached to the thin pole, and is suspended so that it does not quite reach the ground. This is in two parts, the top section being marginally fatter than the lower. The upper end of the pole is slightly pointed whilst its lower end is bluntly rounded. The sculpture is made of fibreglass and aluminium and is painted gloss black.

Costume

The dancer wears a black leotard (with short sleeves in the first production and later, when performed by Rambert, sleeveless (male) or with long sleeves (female) with matching, tightly fitting, slightly flared trousers. The dancer is bare foot.

Lighting

In the stage performance of Soda Lake, the dance commences in silhouette. As the dancer begins to move the lights are raised until white light washes the stage. The light remains intense until the dancer undertakes his/her final movement, at which point the lights are lowered once again to silhouette. In the video performance (1990) of the dance the lighting is bright and remains unchanged throughout because of the needs of the camera for recording.

Accompaniment

The dance is performed in silence. The only audible sounds are those of the dancer's breath and of the dancer's feet on the stage surface.

Movement

Soda Lake is typical of Alston's work produced during his early post-American period. It is apparent that his interest in several choreographic approaches is being utilised within this piece. Soda Lake demonstrates influential moments of

- Cunningham technique
- Release based work
- Michael Clark's physique

Michael Clark provided Alston with a great muse in which to communicate his intentions. He incorporated Clark's fast footwork, upper torso and rhythmic qualities into the work.

These can be further explored through Alston's interest in:

- Balance and off balance
- Body Weight
- Rhythmic complexity

Balance and off balance

Much of the movement material in Soda Lake is concerned with going from on-balance to off-balance and allowing body weight to initiate motion. The dance has been described as being more concerned with skeletal balance than muscular control. This is true of both the faster and the more leisured sections of the dance. Falls of various types, some giving into the floor at their conclusion, others being caught and held mid-fall, appear throughout Soda Lake at irregular intervals. Alston has said of his choreography 'my work is all to do with falling'.

Body weight and gravity

The use of body weight is equally important whether the dancer is floor or air bound. The floor sequence which opens the dance introduces rolls and stretches which luxuriate into and along the floor, not attempting to reach up and away from the supportive, seemingly sticky, stage surface. Similarly, the elevation sequences which follow in a later section of the dance, whilst taking the dancer's weight upwards and away from the floor, have a natural sense of weight. This may be as a result of the swing of a limb or the torso through a downwards focus. The dancer does not appear heavy – the landings remain soft and silent – but the emphasis is not, as in ballet, on weightlessness.

Contrasts in speed

There is a continuous fascination with contrasts in speed- the dancer goes from stillness to rapid movement within a fraction of a second, the change of pace having an excitement resulting from its unexpectedness. Stillness and calm punctuate the dance. However, pauses are not finite but are dependent on the preference of the individual dancer, different performances and changing audiences. In stillness, a sense of breathing movement is maintained. Even at speed the dancer retains a sense of calm and relaxation rather than frantic hurry.

Rhythmic Complexity

Although performed in silence, Soda Lake has a clear rhythm of its own which enhances the dance in terms of depth and logic. When the movement is slow in pace the rhythms are the natural ones which emerge from the body when asked to perform a particular action or series of actions. The slow sections of the work have an organic quality as the movement reflects the breathing and resting of the dancer. During the dance's faster sections, the rhythm, whilst still closely linked to the body's natural response to the gestures it is being asked to perform, gains in complexity and demonstrates irregular rhythmic meter.

Characteristic Positions	
1	Lying on one side of the body in a curled position
2	Parallel retire with both arms raised
3	Arabesque with foot of raised leg flexed, arms raised above head and extended backwards, giving an open shoulder line
4	Kneeling position, leaning forward on one arm, lower legs raised at back, body line straight, one straight arm raised to the front
5	Attitude with body pitched over (torso and arm positions vary throughout)
6	Lunge (either on the front or the back leg)
7	Vertical position, feet together on half toe, one arm close to body, one arm raised straight above the head

Characteristic Movements	
1	Side fall
2	Turning jump taken from two feet to one foot
3	Roll on the floor
4	Very deep knee bend leading into movement of elevation
5	Turns, frequently initiated by the swing of a leg or the swing of arms
6	Run, initiated by a shift of body weight

Form and Structure

Soda Lake is divided into four sections, despite its apparent seamless flow. We can identify these four sections through

1. A change in constituent features, particularly actions, space and dynamics
2. Changes in the relationship between the dancer and sculpture
3. Held positions which act as structural guidelines

Section 1 – The Awakening section (2 minutes 15 seconds)

Section 2 – Tracing the Shapes (2 minutes 15 seconds)

Section 3 – Major Section (4 minutes 30 seconds)

Section 4 – Epilogue (1 minute 15 seconds)

(Timings are approximations – give or take a margin of 10 seconds)

Richard Alston and Rambert (1986 – 1992)

What did Alston bring to the company during its time of prolific change (condensed):

- Cunningham technique
- A fusion of ballet and contemporary technique
- Works with a strong emphasis on design
- A repertoire of mainly abstract works
- A belief that dance should be created for its own sake and not to support a narrative
- Inviting choreographers from abroad to make works for the company
- A change of name to reflect the style and nature of the company at the time

Student Guide

Tasks and Essay Questions

1. List 10 facts that best summarise Richard Alston's Dance career

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2. When was Alston artistic director of Ballet Rambert?

3. Why was Alston dismissed from this role?

4. Alston bears great connections and influence across the London Contemporary dance scene. Identify historic moments that may have led to this achievement.

5. Where did Alston train as a dancer?

6. What was significant about Alston's training?

7. Who was Alston influenced by?

Influenced by	Where	What	Impact

8. Select two of your chosen influences and explain them in further detail

Influence 1
Influence 2

9. Find 3 pieces of information that best evidence Alston's interest in fine art

Evidence 1	Evidence 2	Evidence 3

10. Alston spent time in America, explain the purpose of his visit and the impact of this visit upon his practice

11. Discuss the significance of Merce Cunningham within the dance industry

12. What was it about Cunningham that interested Alston so much?

Cunningham feature 1	
Cunningham feature 2	
Cunningham feature 3	

13. Find out why Alston was so interested in design

14. Summarise five stylistic features of Alston's movement style

1	2	3	4	5

15a. If you were given the opportunity to ask Alston 3 questions about his choreographic process what would they be?

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

15b. Now find the answers to your question (use the internet, library and publications to help you)

15. Discuss the stylistic features of Ballet Rambert before, during and after Alston took on the role of artistic director.

Before	During	After

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16. Identify the starting points for Pulcinella and Soda Lake

Pulcinella	Soda Lake

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17. Identify the similarities and differences of the two professional works

Pulcinella	
Soda Lake	

18. Research the creative team for each professional work

19. Summarise the stylistic features of both works

20. How did the works challenge audiences of that time period?

21. The design of both works was very important to Alston. Discuss the use of both physical design and spatial design within the works.

Physical design	
Spatial design	

22. How did Alston use his dancer's skills to convey his choreographic intention?

23. What was significant about both works?

Significant features of Pulcinella	Significant features of Soda Lake

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24. The treatment of a subject matter is critical when engaging with the choreographic process and can determine the outcome of the finished product. Explain the treatment of the subject matter for both works.

Pulcinella	
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Soda Lake	
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Essay Questions

25. When Alston left Rambert Dance Company in 1992 his interest in design became less prominent and instead he turned to music. Research and discuss this statement.
26. Analyse and explain the ways in which Alston developed Ballet Rambert/Rambert Dance Company during his time of leadership.
27. Discuss the influences of Alston (you must refer to at least two professional works).
28. Analyse and discuss Alston's use of the constituent features (DDPAM).
29. Discuss why Soda Lake was considered to be to be 'out there' for audiences of that time period.
30. Commedia dell'arte underpins the creation of Pulcinella. Explain how this art form relates to Alston's choreographic intention for the piece.
31. How does Alston serve the British dance scene to this present day? Consider education, training and development in your response.

END OF PACK

