



Essential Alston

The Education Programme of Richard Alston Dance Company

Richard Alston discusses *Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms*

Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms deals with privacy, with a delicacy of feeling masked by the formal façade of propriety and gracious behaviour.

When Denis Gaultier wrote his lute pieces in the 17th Century, a music lesson could act as the polite cover for stolen moments of intimacy. The music master's attentive correction of the pupil's fingering on an instrument involved close physical contact and sensual touch - all in the name of art and its high ideals.



Jo Kondo's *Ars Brevis*, music inspired by Gaultier's "style brisé" (literally "broken style"), adds a 20th Century tension to this formality - a more overt picture of the undercurrents swirling beneath such a demeanour of dignity.

Why mix 17th Century and 20th Century music together in one piece?

I like to work with a range of music and whilst I enjoy 17th and 18th Century music I am also keen to keep in touch with 20th Century music and living composers. Jo Kondo is a Japanese composer whose work I admire very much. I've chosen a piece he wrote for mandolin. It's an interesting, strange and unusual sound to be played in the theatre and I very much like its taut quality.

The Denis Gaultier music of the 17th Century is music that you can move to, but is quieter and more intimate, played by one musician. Combining the two styles of music together results in the beautiful, strange, soft world of Gaultier that then gets pulled kicking and screaming into the 20th Century by Kondo.

As well as the music what inspiration is behind the piece?

The dancing speaks for itself, duets leading to very intimate scenarios. Interiors. Private Rooms. I have been looking at 17th Century Dutch paintings of a particular young woman whose face displays purity and quietness, but also contains many undercurrents behind the eyes. In one painting, as she looks out of the window, I imagine her waiting for her good-looking music master to arrive. This reminds me of other paintings of music lessons, with the music master leaning over the young woman; music can be very sensual. This is what I have tried to mix into the duets, the idea of two people together being quite formal but with something definite going on between them.

The lighting designer, Charles Balfour and I have tried to reproduce the idea of the window in the painting when lighting the piece. Each duet has a window on stage, a nucleus of light - light flooding into a darkened room.



Richard Alston Dance Company

Key points/moments to look for in the pieces.

This is a piece about privacy and personal feelings. Everything is very played down, the movement tightly composed. The duet with Chris and Angela shows moments of tenderness, at times overtly but at other times they are composed and very formal, yet there is much expression from within. I believe it is possible to express deeper feelings privately and that emotion continues to happen underneath and this can be very beautiful.

When the mandolin music starts the whole thing opens out and the movement is much more athletic. In the private duet the dancers face each other in close contact. We often only see the back of one of them. In the second half of the work the couple face us side by side. It is still formal dancing, but more confident and on display.

© Rebecca Seymour

