

soon developed an interest in choreography, making his choreographic debut in 1968 with *Transit*.

From the start of his career, Alston stood out among his classmates at London Contemporary. Alston absorbed the school's Graham-based technique, yet did not find it totally congenial: physically, because his long thin body found Graham contractions difficult; temperamentally, because he preferred cooler choreography than Graham's turbulent dance-dramas. Instead, he was attracted to the grace and lucidity of Merce Cunningham's technique. The influence of Cunningham upon Alston was apparent in several early works, among them *Nowhere Slowly* (1970), a piece which existed in various versions; it could be danced to several different scores and its sections could be performed in any order.

After choreographing for the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Alston directed his own company, Strider, from 1972 to 1975. The first independent group to spring from the London Contemporary framework, Strider was Alston's creation, yet also served as a showcase for other choreographers. It emphasized Cunningham rather than Graham technique, as well as an approach to body alignment known as release technique, which had been developed by Mary Fulkerson, an American dancer and choreographer who had joined the dance faculty at Dartington Hall and who also served as a teacher for Strider.

Alston studied in America, 1975–1977. Back in London, he began to work with Ballet Rambert in 1979 and was named resident choreographer in 1980. Two years later, he formed another company, Second Stride, with Siobhan Davies and Ian Spink. In 1986, he was appointed artistic director of Ballet Rambert (renamed Rambert Dance Company in 1987), a post he held until 1992.

Although Alston's choreography has been varied, it can be said that he has had an abiding interest in pure dance. He himself has stated that he wishes to create "dances about dancing."¹⁰

Some of his early works, however, reveled in "impurity." *Comelines*, a fifty-minute piece of 1972 that was created in collaboration with the performance artist and film-maker Sally Potter, offered mixtures of sounds and sights. The accompaniment ranged from Bach, Mozart, and Schubert to "Georgia on My Mind" and "Stormy Weather." Films and slides were projected on several screens. And the choreography included both pedestrian movements and complex dance steps.

Alston soon preferred esthetic harmony to such theatrical jumbles. His *Rainbow Bandit* (a 1977 revision of a work of 1974) could be described as a gradual attainment of clarity. It began with a deliberately chaotic section filled with conflicting strands of activity, but these were eventually sorted out in the piece's last section.

As he developed, Alston increasingly turned to music, rather than dramatic situations, as a source of inspiration, developing a style that stressed ease, efficiency, and the avoidance of strain—qualities that made several of his pieces seem quasi-balletic. His choreography is rhythmically precise and the movements he favors have been called cool and sometimes even asexual.¹¹

In 1981, he choreographed a successful version of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Yet Alston has admitted that he finds narrative troublesome, saying, "I will *not* waste good music on telling stories."¹² Usually, Alston allows movement qualities to establish moods or suggest emotions. *Apollo Distracted* (1982) emphasizes tensions between Apollonian (contained) and Dionysian (explosive) movements. There is also an affectionate allusion to ballet history in a sequence in which a female soloist dances an adagio with three men, a reversal of the central situation in *Apollo*, George Balanchine's masterpiece of 1928, in which a male god dances with three Muses.

Alston consciously pares narration away from his choreography. For *Night Moves* (1981), to the music of Mozart, Alston supplied his designer, the painter Howard Hodgkin, with a scenario concerning Mozart and people the composer knew so that Hodgkin could gain a sense of the work's overall style. But although the actual dance appears to show the confrontations of guests at a party, the narrative is underplayed.

Alston's lucidity suggests the influence of ballet and Cunningham. But he also admires Twyla Tharp and shares her interest in popular culture. His *Java* (1983, revised 1985) looks back on the 1940s and 1950s and is set to recordings by the black pop group the Ink Spots; *Strong Language* (1987) contains references to disco dancing; and his version of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1988) honors Fred Astaire and exhibition ballroom dancing.

One of Alston's classmates at the London School of Contemporary Dance was another former art student who developed into an important choreographer: Siobhan Davies. Like Alston, Davies, who was born in 1950, entered the school during its first year. Before that,