

Resource pages: GCSE and A Level

Overdrive

by Richard Alston Dance Company

INTRODUCTION

The information presented below is a preview of *Into Overdrive: A Teacher's Guide*, available from Richard Alston Dance Company, priced £12.95. The guide contains detailed lessons plans and extension tasks, worksheets and assessment sheets and acts as a companion to a DVD (priced £24.99) which contains the full performance of *Overdrive*, lecture/demonstration material and interviews with Richard Alston, Terry Riley and Steffan Schleiermacher.

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OVERDRIVE FACTS

- **Choreography:** Richard Alston
- **Music:** Terry Riley – *Keyboard Study #1*
- **Lighting:** Charles Balfour
- **Costumes:** Jeanne Spaziani
- **Running time:** approximately 21 minutes
- **Cast:** 11 dancers

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

RICHARD ALSTON DISCUSSES THE CHOREOGRAPHY

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

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

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

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

Richard Alston, 16 September 2003



Richard Alston and participants in his session, 'Developing Musicality in Performance', at the NDTA Annual Conference 2009. Photo: Simon Richardson

SOLO TASK

Aim

To create a solo phrase.

Activity

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

Learning outcomes

- Through learning repertoire, students can improve their technique and performance quality in addition to increasing their movement vocabulary.
- Students will understand how to fragment and re-order a phrase and appreciate the importance and effectiveness of varying direction.
- Students will understand how to accent a particular movement, change the level and adapt the quality of the movement through finding moments of suspension.

Warm up

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

Repertoire

The opening section of *Overdrive* begins with two male dancers entering the space and performing a duet in unison. The first half of this duet can be broken down into four clear sections each consisting of nine counts.

Select eight key/favourite movements from the opening unison duet to create your own phrase. Create four changes of direction in your phrase

(Link to DVD: Studio Footage – Section Six: view Richard Alston discussing three-dimensional movement in space.)

Extension tasks

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

(Link to DVD: Studio Footage – Section Ten: view the example of accenting movement.)

For further information and news about Richard Alston Dance Company, please visit www.theplace.org.uk/radc