

Chopin's Alston and Alston's Chopin—Stephanie Jordan

Introduction: Chopin and Dance--Chopin and Alston

Still today, for many of us who have studied dance, mention Chopin, and our minds fill with childhood memories of the ballet class. We may also recall being transported by his music into another, magical world. Perhaps too we are a little unnerved by the saccharine image that has dogged Chopin since the nineteenth century. Michel Fokine's long-tutu *Les Sylphides* (1908) is at least partly responsible for this view, over-romanticised (and over-orchestrated) in many performances, although it has now disappeared from the repertory of many ballet companies. But countless choreographers who have set Chopin's music since Fokine do not necessarily hear the composer that way. Certainly, the modern/contemporary dance choreographer Richard Alston responds to him quite differently.

Seeing Alston's work through the lens of Chopin is intriguing for several reasons. Alston has earned himself a significant reputation as a 'musical' choreographer. Music is the primary force behind his choreography—which rarely incorporates concrete narrative—and celebrated for bringing on the interpretative, creative and specifically 'musical' voices of his dancers. Several important, related questions arise, too, about the nature and identity of dance works. As regards re-visioning the potential of Chopin's music, what happens to concert music when it is used for dance? How is the identity of the music changed within the new context? Is a dance work ever finished? What is the role of the performer (dancer or musician) during the making process and the history of a dance work within the repertoire? And how does the choreography relate structurally to the music, given that structure is hardly ever addressed in dance literature, yet, given its expressive implications and potential for meaning, is one of the richest aspects of Alston's work?¹

Another, fundamental question is: why choreograph Chopin, or write about Chopin and dance today? Obviously, even if he never wrote for the theatre, he wrote a huge amount of music that urges us to move, and some specifically using dance rhythms, like the many mazurkas and waltzes. Chopin has also come to be regarded in ways that dispel the tired old imagery promulgated by dance tradition. Within musicology, the mythological import of Chopin as a sensitive, fragile romantic has been usefully questioned, revealing the muscular, robust side of him. In short, Chopin has become more interesting. Musicology has long provided structural studies of Chopin's scores, but more recently, research into performance practice and studies that have placed his work within a range of cultural, historical and other interdisciplinary perspectives show how Chopin history, of the man and his music (the two closely entwined within his mythology), has been adopted to meet the needs of different periods and cultural contexts.² For instance, musicological studies indicate that Chopin has been transformed by the French into an ideal romantic poet-composer, yet domesticated in the drawing-rooms of the English and seen as a pioneering modernist and icon of nationalism by the Poles and Russians. There is also acknowledgement of the composer's own enthusiasm for social dance (as dancer and accompanist, often referring to Polish customs from exile in Paris). Then there are allusions to the dark side of romanticism, and in particular, to the underside of this Ariel or elf Trilby of the piano,³ the dangerous supernatural. We note awareness of both the introspective, yearning aspect of Chopin's music and the radical turbulence of his harmonies, and finally, of the network of unstable meanings foregrounding sex and gender, helping to forge images of Chopin as an androgynous being.

Yet there is surprisingly little research linking the composer directly with dance, important exceptions being Eric McKee's detailed account of Chopin's waltzes (2012)⁴ and their origins in actual dance music, and Marianne Kielian-Gilbert's essay (2004)⁵ surveying Chopin settings in ballet as well as film and television. There is room for much more discussion, working outwards from dance tradition and scrutinizing how choreographic strategies have stimulated new readings of Chopin's music, in other words, the impact of dance upon our understanding of his music. This is significant, given that it has so often been choreographed, and there are today interdisciplinary methodologies primed to reveal the powerful effects of dance upon music.

Returning to Alston, it is perhaps significant that there was a Chopin component within his 1972 *Combines*, a conceptual piece with a collage score. This used music primarily for its connotations, dissociated from the action on stage in order to trouble (and therefore heighten) the viewer's experience of that action. Alston chose the D Minor Prelude Op. 28, No. 24 played through twice: the first time, just the left hand part (accompanying a solo for Ross McKim), the second time, both parts together including the melody line (next to the same dance material distributed between three men). After the *Combines* experiment and, in 1981, a solo setting for Lucy Burge of Chopin's Berceuse (Op. 57), Alston steered away from Chopin until 2005.⁶

It is this later period that my article addresses, and his two Chopin works *Such Longing* (2005) and *Mazur* (2015, using the Polish word for mazurka). Here, Chopin is embraced rather than confronted for conceptual purposes, in this respect absorbed into the long tradition of music dances (dances to existing scores) and, more locally, Chopin piano ballets.⁷

Alston's programme note for *Such Longing* (which contains a variety of piano music) immediately points to both the burden (he cites the American ballet choreographer Jerome Robbins) and stimulation of Chopin dance tradition.

Music can be loaded with dance associations. Impossible for me to hear Chopin and not think of images from Jerome Robbins's *Dances at a Gathering* [1969], a revelation when I first came to London. Such strong memories can make a choreographer nervous, and I have never until now dared touch Chopin. It has such intensity, such swirls of romanticism—great crescendos crashing headlong into hushed reverie.

There are broad hints of Robbins in the opening Mazurka of *Such Longing* but from there I don't know where I've gone, conscious only of having tried hard to stay open to the sheer beauty, the sheer daring of the music – subtle sad modulations of an obsessive melancholic.⁸

In a perceptive 2005 review, *Guardian* critic Judith Mackrell identified *Such Longing* as a breakthrough piece, noting links with Robbins but pointing out how different it was from both Robbins' ballets and Alston's other work. Chopin was clearly special to Alston, and interestingly, Mackrell also introduces the perspective of the accompanying pianist Jason Ridgway:

Not only is *Such Longing* set to Chopin piano music (like the Robbins) but it's rich in similar romantic references - hints of spry, folksy footwork and soft, irresolute arms that look nothing like Alston's usual dance language.

But *Such Longing* is much, much more than a homage - for Alston uses the bare foot heft and sensuality of his modern dancers to give the choreography a very different physical charge. The dancers' sudden darts of speed, their fierce moments of stillness touch raw nerves in Chopin that go way beyond Robbins' scope. And this sense of an almost flayed engagement with the music is doubled by pianist Jason Ridgeway (playing live on stage) who

performs with something like a dancer's sensibility. His ability to transmit the physical pleasure of fingering the notes and to project and place the sound in space combines with Alston's choreography to create one of the most visceral experiences of Chopin on stage.⁹

It is important that Alston has had a long collaborative relationship with Ridgway, since 1999, making eleven other works in the genre of 'piano ballet' with the pianist on stage (and four of these to other nineteenth-century music: Schumann and Brahms).

Alston's programme note on *Mazur* highlights the political, nationalist context in which Chopin worked—the mazurkas became a rallying point for nationalist feelings in Poland--and which in turn became a stimulus to him as choreographer:

In Paris as an exile from Poland, Chopin's fellow expatriates were particularly important, his close friends in a vast strange city. The Mazurkas, perhaps of all his compositions the most strikingly Polish, are an intense outpouring of longing for his beloved homeland.

Mazur is a dance of friends sharing what they love and what they regret having lost.

Mazur's friends are two men (originally Liam Riddick and Jonathan Goddard), alternating in solos (two each) and three duets, and there are many allusions to East European dance style, in, for instance, heel clicks and hands to hips or waist. Alston boldly extends beyond characteristic associations of Chopin with femininity in celebrating male dancers. Riddick he privately named Chopin in rehearsal, just as he had cast the solo dancer Martin Lawrance in *Such Longing* as a Chopin figure. But, in *Mazur*, he recalled too the relationship between Chopin and a Polish friend Jan Matuszynski who shared an apartment in Paris with him and Alston suggests that he was in love with Chopin. Alston also discussed with both dancers the subject of loss of homeland. Indeed he shared a range of 'narrative' information with them:

I talked about each Mazurka having its own emotional temperature and that for me the composite dance was a portrait of different facets of Chopin's psychological make up, his depressions and anguish and of course almost constant ill-health but all bathed in his idealised memories of Poland.

At the same time, this information was used primarily as a generative force for the performers, and withheld from audiences:

I can be quite detailed, almost literal in giving dancers fuel for their imagination, but I really do not want to spoon-feed the audience with what they should feel.

It is significant too that Chopin's mazurkas have maintained their reputation over the years as unsettling, strange, idiosyncratic music, with unusual chromaticism and rhythmic disruptions. Characteristics across a variety of rural, urban, folk and art experiences of the genre are its triple metre, sharpened fourths in the melody, open fifth drone basses, repeating motives in a fairly restricted pitch range, accents on any beat--most importantly not always the first--and frequent cadences stressing the second beat of the bar.¹⁰ The extraordinary range of speed and mood in Chopin's Mazurkas increasingly fascinated Alston: slow, fast, and in between the two, melancholic, vivacious, sometimes deeply reserved, sometimes broadly extrovert.

Deliberately, the Chopin music that Alston selected had been used by neither Fokine nor Robbins, and the latter had choreographed three other Chopin ballets in addition to *Dances at a Gathering: The Concert* (1956), *In the Night* (1970) and *Other Dances* (1976). There was one exception: Alston

discovered only after choreographing it himself that the music for the opening solo in *Such Longing* was the same as for the pas de deux that opens *Other Dances*.

In this article, I stress that the story of Alston's association with Chopin in *Such Longing* and *Mazur* continues beyond their premiere dates. Each work has a history of change through multiple performances. *Mazur*, for instance, was in the repertory of the Richard Alston Dance Company (RADC, a modern/contemporary dance company) for almost two years (2015-17), given a total of 22 performances, with one change of cast: Nicholas Bodych taking over from Jonathan Goddard after the premiere group of performances. *Mazur* was brought back into the repertory in autumn 2019. *Such Longing* too was created for RADC, then later staged for New York Theatre Ballet (NYTB), a chamber company with which Alston is now regularly associated and for which he introduces pointe work.¹¹ So this piece changed radically in terms of movement style, a mixture of ballet (or rather a greater balletic presence, for he has often incorporated ballet steps) with his own style. The latter involves a different, breath rhythm, fall and recovery of weight, and a use of the back to twist, curve and tilt influenced by the style of Merce Cunningham.¹²

Alston developed his ideas further in this later version of *Such Longing*, omitting the Prelude, interleaving the finale from *Mazur*, and adding two more Mazurkas: Op.63, No. 2 and Op. 68, No. 2, the latter accompanying a shortened version of the choreography originally set to the Nocturne Op. posth. 72 in E minor. Alston recalls the broadcaster and writer John Drummond complaining that the original *Such Longing* was too much about a sad or even 'depressing' Chopin. Alston duly took this into account in the restaging and removal of this Nocturne music, while we can also see that the Mazurkas had become especially important to him. He decided, too, to re-order slightly the NYTB version of the dance immediately after its premiere performance. The order of dances within each piece and version of a piece, together with the premiere casting, is laid out below:

Such Longing—first version RADC (2005) (later, for the purpose of this article, referred to as Such Longing 1)

Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4 in A minor Martin Lawrance

Nouvelle Etude No. 1 in F minor Luke Baio

Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2 in D flat major Jonathan Goddard and Ino Riga

Nocturne Op. posth. 72 in E minor Martin Lawrance and Francesca Romo

Etude Op. 25, No. 1 in A flat major full cast 5 dancers

[Prelude Op. 45 in C sharp major (added before the final Etude for the 2006 Joyce Theatre performance) Sonja Peedo, Luke Baio and Francesca Romo]

Mazur--RADC (2015)

Mazurka Op. 30, No. 3 in D-flat major Allegro non troppo duet 1 Jonathan Goddard and Liam Riddick

Mazurka Op. 7, No. 3 in F minor (Moderato) Goddard solo 1

Mazurka Op. 33, No. 1 in G-sharp minor Mesto Riddick solo 1

Mazurka Op. 68, No. 1 in C major Vivace Goddard solo 2

Mazurka Op. 67, No. 2 in G minor Cantabile Riddick solo 2

Mazurka Op. 41, No. 2 in E minor Andantino duet 2

Mazurka Op. 50, No. 1 in G major Vivace duet 3

Such Longing—second version, New York Theatre Ballet first night (2015) (later called Such Longing 2)

Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4 in A minor Steven Melendez

Nouvelle Etude No. 1 in F minor Choong Hoon Lee

Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2 in D flat major Melendez and Amanda Treiber

Mazurka Op. 63, No. 2 in F minor (new) one, then two, women Treiber and Rie Ogura

Mazurka Op. 50, No. 1 in G major (the *Mazur* finale) the two men

Mazurka Op. 68, No. 2 in A minor Lee and Ogura (replacing Nocturne Op. posth. 72 in E minor, ref. the 2005 version above, and very close to the earlier version except at the start of the recapitulation)
Mazurka Op. 6, No. 3 in E major (new) two duets into quartet
Etude Op. 25, No. 1 in A flat major finale all four dancers

Such Longing—second version, New York Theatre Ballet second night (2015)

Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4 in A minor solo
Nouvelle Etude No. 1 in F minor solo
Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2 in D flat major duet
Mazurka Op. 68, No. 2 in F minor one man/one woman
Mazurka Op. 63, No. 2 in F minor one, then two, women
Mazurka Op. 50, No. 1 in G major (the *Mazur* finale) the two men
Mazurka Op. 6, No. 3 in E major duets into quartet
Etude Op. 25, No. 1 in A flat major all four dancers

Finally, before heading into analysis, a note on creative and collaborative processes is relevant, and this reflects Alston's mature, developed practice over many years. In my recent discussions with him, he told me that he starts his music-based dances by listening to multiple musical recordings and looking at scores, as basis for decisions about both musical selection and performance. All his movement is made within the dance studio, and nowadays, he feels at ease dropping his attachment to the score early on and concentrating entirely on hearing the music. For the Chopin dances, Alston explored a number of recordings, by, for instance, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, Daniel Barenboim, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Artur Schnabel, Martha Argerich, Alicia de Larrocha and Murray Perahia.¹³ He guided Ridgway towards these recordings and continued to explore some of them in rehearsal. Then, both Alston and Ridgway began to respond to each other's ideas, down to the detail of accentuation and dynamics, Ridgway entering the practical conversation for a few rehearsals prior to the premiere (partly determined by the budget, partly by his availability), yet ready to mould his own interpretation to suit the choreography. Alston works fast in the studio and then watches film footage of the day's achievements, again and again, re-thinking and refining in preparation for the following day's rehearsal. During the touring schedule, as the dances continue to develop through performance, the dancers are most likely to rehearse the work to a filmed recording of one of their own performances with Ridgway at the piano. Early processes mix Alston's strict control with his confidence to introduce radical change, and then the performers (both Ridgway and the dancers) start to find their own way.

Listening and Watching: A Framework for Analysis

I turn at this point to fundamental principles for looking at, and writing about, music and dance, what has come to be called, since the early 1990s, 'choreomusical' analysis. This is a small, even if developing field of study and, for example, apart from my own analysis of Alston's *Shimmer* (2004, to Ravel), no other choreomusical analysis of his dances has been undertaken.¹⁴ For me, a key concept is that music and dance operate as a composite form in dynamic interaction, rather than dance functioning as an extra layer that more or less copies the forms of already existing music. Thus, both media are seen as subject to change rather than static entities, operating within a mechanism of interdependence rather than maintaining the hard binary of strict pitch/rhythm matching versus counterpoint. Whilst audiences might still be able to trace the separate development of the two media, and those who already know an existing musical score are most likely to maintain a separate musical experience, these two sensory planes now meet to affect each other and to create a new identity from their meeting. If we already know Chopin's music, our

perceptions of it might well be changed through Alston's choreography. These principles, which I use here, develop from intermedia theories, from film music theory primarily, but also from general music theory, drawing on cross-modal ideas (the visual and aural in combination) from cognitive science.¹⁵

I also respond to the emergence of recent music theory from the distant corners of abstraction, to welcome the role of embodiment and interpretation in musical experience. Thus, although we might take aesthetic pleasure in tracing structural intricacies and rigour, we can also work with the principle that musical and dance structures—such as pitch/movement level, tonality, counterpoint, dynamics, grouping and repetition—are all potentially meaningful.¹⁶ Furthermore, as Theresa Buckland insists, structure is part of “the wider phenomenon of dance [and music] as a culturally codified and meaningful human action”.¹⁷

1. Starting with the Music

Let us work from Alston's point of view, starting as he did with the existing music, faced with temporal musical structures and the phenomena of 1. repetition, as the immediate reiteration of material, and 2. return, or recapitulation, as the recurrence of material after a lapse of time. To illustrate this, I will focus mainly on the Mazurkas. Here, structural concepts were clearly of paramount interest to Chopin: it was this genre that gave rise to far more corrections and re-thinking than any other.¹⁸ From now on, it is important to approach the analyses as slow, close readings, while watching the film clips alongside. (Music scores for all the Chopin pieces used by Alston are available online.) Bear in mind too that the individual sections of my article that follow can also be read independently as self-standing entities outside of their order within the article.

Overall, the Mazurka is a repetition/return form, with primary thematic material that we will label A book-ending contrasting sections of material, sometimes with a Coda, sometimes with an introduction and transition passages. Here are examples of Mazurka forms that Alston has used and that will be re-visited during the analyses of his choreography. First, a simple example, the music of which can be heard during clips 4-6 (and see Ex. 1):

Op. 33, No. 1 in *Mazur*

A (12 bars); B (8 bars); C (16 bars, with a drone bass); A (12 bars); Coda

Less common and more like Rondo form is the following example, with two internal returns of the primary thematic material. The music can be heard during clip 1 (and see Ex.2):

Op. 17, No. 4 in *Such Longing*

Introduction (4 bars); A (32 bars, in A1-A2 statement-response--16 bars, and again A1-A2 statement-response--16 bars); B (8 bars); A (A1-A2, 16 bars); C (32 bars, with a drone bass); A (A1-A2, 16 bars); Coda (16 bars + 8 bars mirroring the Introduction)

Each of these labelled sections is also likely to contain internal repeats, but return (repetition after a break) is key to articulating larger structural units, emphasising points of arrival and departure and similarities between units of material. A final Section A, for instance, can provide a major effect of closure at the end of a Mazurka, and with an affirmative cadence in the tonic key, a sense of coming-home stability.¹⁹

It is also important that, in Chopin's Mazurkas, patterns of repeating units tend towards symmetry, within a duple hierarchy of units: 1, 2, 4, 8 and 16 bars, regularly confirming the organisation of the dance form to which he alludes. The famous observation of the 'tyranny of the four-bar phrase' in early nineteenth-century music arose from this hierarchy.²⁰ Yet recall that, stemming from the specific Mazurka heritage, Chopin's Mazurkas often weight beats 2 or 3 of the 3/4 metre, not only the more traditional beat 1, the downbeat of the bar.

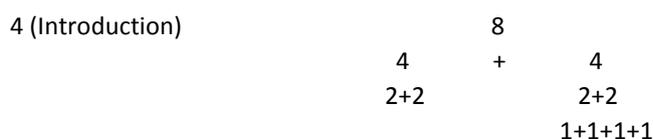
There is evidence from the composer's corrections that he often wanted to experiment with modified structures and breathe new life into conventional tactics. Op. 33, No. 1 (for *Mazur*) and Op. 17, No. 4 (for *Such Longing*) illustrate this well. Section A in Op. 33, No. 1 opens with a 12-bar phrase,²¹ outside the duple hierarchy. The last four bars are a repeat of bars 5-8 and consequently create emphasis.

Ex. 1 Bars 1-12 (music notation—Op. 33. No1)

Here, there is also overlap between A and B, a rhythm shared while supporting different melodic content, after which (in B) the motif of bar 1 echoes up and down across an octave. The beginning of this Mazurka is unusual too, avoiding tonic harmony, in other words, any clear sense of the home key of G sharp major, until bar 2, and then moving on melodically, without accompaniment, in a manner that defeats any convincing sense of 3/4 metre. We are left deeply uncertain rhythmically and harmonically and, as we shall see, the music supports an emotionally unstable choreography.

In 1990, musicologist Jeffrey Kallberg said that Op. 17, No. 4 is 'one of the few mazurkas continuously favoured by pianists since Chopin's time',²² and, we could add, regularly favoured by those who analyse music or are choreographers (for instance, José Limon and Jerome Robbins prior to Alston). Let us first consider the structure of the opening 8-bar phrase of Section A (A1), which constitutes the main, repeating theme (after a 4-bar Introduction), looking particularly at how the melodic/harmonic material can be parsed:

Diagram of musical structure, the 4-bar Introduction followed by an 8-bar phrase:



The 4+4 structure of the 8-bar phrase derives from two components of change: the progression upwards in pitch, followed by the progression downwards, and a difference in rhythm and melodic pattern between these two progressions. During the first half of this phrase, two 2-bar units become clear, each containing short note values leading to a sustained note. In the second half, we hear four falling intervals, thirds and fourths, all taking the weight off the downbeat of the bar, as four 1-bar divisions that can also group into two 2-bar divisions by virtue of the syncopations introduced during the last two bars.

Ex. 2 Bars 1-12 (music notation—Op. 17, No. 4)

Chopin avoids straight returns of Section A by changing the ornamentation each time you hear it. His final return is a fore-shortened account of this material (16 rather than 32 bars), followed by a long, structurally-weighted coda that re-introduces yet again the melancholic falling interval that haunts this piece. Rising intervals (on beat 1) only serve to stress further the falling (on beat 2) and

eventually the big drops (on beat 3) from a grace note—although these could also be construed as new ideas—all of this delaying closure.

Meanwhile, the Introduction is quirky, with modal harmony and, as Kallberg says: ‘before any hint of an A-minor tonic has been heard—the harmony seems to suggest either Aeolian on A or Dorian on D.’²³ The relationship between the beginning and end of this Mazurka is also fascinating as regards final closure. As Kallberg explains:

Here the final four measures [bars] recapitulate almost identically the opening four measures of the piece. What seemed initially a gesture of thematic anticipation—the rising third in the inner voice of the chordal progression matches the rising third that opens the principal theme —now distantly recalls, at the end of the coda, the events of the body of the Mazurka. As it does so, it simultaneously diffuses tension (Chopin tried to convey this to performers through his direction *perdendosi*, ‘dying away’) and leaves this tension harmonically unresolved (the piece ends on a VI⁶ chord)... In fact it is atypical of the genre. Indeed, by both diffusing tension and avoiding strong closure it more closely resembles the sort of coda found in nocturnes.²⁴

The ‘dying away’ at the end also seems to slip briefly in and out of 2/4 metre, another worry of ambiguity before final resolution.

Ex. 3 Final 4 bars (music notation—Op. 17, No. 4)

Kallberg has pointed out that this particular Mazurka bears still further Nocturne characteristics, relating to ornamentation.²⁵ In this respect, it has a particular kinship with the first Nocturne in *Such Longing*, Op. 27, No. 2. There is a striking similarity of melodic figuration between the Codas. Both contain a series of falling intervals including grace notes. Chopin’s Nocturnes use the duple structural hierarchy less regularly than the Mazurkas, and the divisions in them between units of material are also far less clear. The pair of Nocturnes that Alston sets in *Such Longing* often suggest unbroken flow and operate as variations quite as much as repetition/return forms. Both repeat opening material, with more and more lavish, even lace-like ornamentation—a fundamental feature of the writing that itself introduces subtle fluctuations in beat and dynamics²⁶—and with lengthy Codas over bass tonic pedals. Other Chopin pieces used by Alston, the two Etudes and Preludes, are shorter, tend to be more monothematic and less ornamented, over one style of accompaniment. They are even less clearly sectional in structure.

2. Choreographing the Music

Faced with Chopin’s complexities, choreographers can choose whether to match his repetition/return patterns in their music, a procedure that makes the particular musical passage stand out even more in the manner of a structural signpost. On the other hand, masking a final, emphatic musical return might do quite the opposite, giving the impression of openness and continuing progression, rather than resolution or finality, instability rather than stability. As for Alston’s attitude to structure, he said in a lecture-demonstration on *Shimmer* (2004, to Ravel), ‘I have an allergy to repeats... They’re comforting, but I like keeping people on the edge of their seats.’²⁷ Often, he prefers to see the same movement to new music or vice versa, directly engaging with the renewal option, getting us to experience the dance or music in different ways. Yet, in terms of legibility: ‘I’ve discovered that I can articulate a difficult rhythmic phrase if the sound echoes them...A lot of my work is about the play between imitating a vocal or melodic line and leaving it.’²⁸ These observations about perception have a long history. In the mid-1970s, Alston began to explore

various ways of engaging spectators with material that might be very complex, fast or small, understanding that this reads less easily than slow, large or simple movement.²⁹ In an article in *Artscribe* (1979), discussing his *Rainbow Bandit* (1974) and *Doublework* (1978), he clarified his theories about dance perception across spans of time:

Because dance occurs in time it involves not only perception of the instant but also visual memory, and so the limit to what one perceives is not merely how much the eye can take in but how much of that information can be retained.³⁰

Although he believes that today's audiences can absorb a greater density of dance information than they could in the 1970s, Alston still shifts between challenge and respite during the course of his pieces. This includes testing out different closure procedures, and the regular mapping of dance on to musical material—or the avoidance of such mapping—right down to the detail of musical pitch (rise and fall) and rhythms. The practice of regular, predictable mapping is often referred to as 'music visualisation', a term probably first used in the early twentieth century for the style of modern dance pioneers in America, in particular, Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn, and more latterly for the style of the American choreographer Mark Morris.³¹ But Alston is not one to work in this way. As we shall see, his preferred style is to be sparing with matching structures and more detailed pitch and rhythmic mapping, to save these procedures for special stress in special circumstances, and then they may well come to have special power.

As for Alston's response to detail, returning to the concept of interaction between media, we will see later that there are occasions when we literally hear notes or musical lines from an existing score that we have not noticed before, or that suddenly emerge more strongly. Movement seems to seek out related properties in the music and vice versa, influencing our perceptions, and tricking us into thinking that there is a relationship when this is not obvious. Sometimes, he will ask Ridgway to bring out a note or underneath line, so that we can 'hear the reason for the choreography'. This phenomenon has been known for years by cognitive scientists as 'visual capture', a kind of music visualisation, and the other way round as 'auditory capture'.³² Whichever situation, new meanings emerge from this kind of contact.

Yet there are many ways in which choreographers can encourage greater freedom from musical structure. Dancers can articulate or mark particular notes that are clearly 'choreographed', but they can also connect with these as they anticipate or echo them, another kind of articulation or marking. Or they find other notes to underline when the music repeats. Or they let their movement flow over the musical seams, and the opposite, when the music seems to move on without them. Crucially, in all these freer relationships, it is still possible for dancers to listen and be deeply in touch with their music, still preserving some measure of contact with it. Alston understands that audiences too are primed to find connections between what they see and hear, connections that might be of a very subtle kind.

Meanwhile, we must not forget that meaning is a key feature that derives directly from movement and the manner in which it is structured in relation to music. Interpretation of his work is not something that Alston offers in conversation, at least in any detail. (In this article, I take responsibility for the detail.) Nevertheless, it is important that his dances are very much about human beings and their stories, ambiguous and ungrounded in concrete narrative as these stories are. Not matching musical structures, for instance, might contribute to an impression of exploration, mood development, emotional hiatus, thought process, and sometimes the journey suggests a tension with the sound base. On the other hand, occasions of matching might well

suggest confirmation or resolution, especially when the music already suggests tonal resolution (see p. 6).

Consider now the liveness of corporeal mediation, the presence of our bodies when we watch and listen, a topic that recent musicology has embraced with considerable enthusiasm. There is a physical immediacy from Alston's movement style that draws our bodies readily into his work, and perhaps it is significant that he often sings an accompaniment to his dancers in rehearsal, literally embodying the music rather than merely counting out its metrical framework. He once spoke in interview about classical ballet being 'so relentlessly concerned with shape', and that he wants 'to know more about the person... what comes from inside...it's not a look that I want – it's a feeling.'³³ He also gives the image of a 'figure-of-eight'--often built up from the overlapping phrases of more than one dancer in conversation. There is always in his work, he says:

a flow of energy... I think of the body as a book that opens and closes really from the spine. I'm very often taking one side out and then the other side out and then folding over like a continuous moebius strip so that the flow of energy is going: rising, falling, rhythmic steps, long big sweeping movements...³⁴

This flow is also the flow of melody, which, Alston says 'is really what dancers breathe with'—not pulse or metre.³⁵

In this regard, it is relevant that I have sketch-learnt movement ideas from Alston's work as part of my analytical process, relating these ideas directly to their music. It is also useful to me that I undertook regular dance technique classes with Alston during the late 1970s and early 1980s: Cunningham-based classes, but with much more sense of breath and play with weight than the 'pure' New York Cunningham class.

This kind of embodied experience can inform choreomusical analysis, comparable as it is to the practice of many who analyse music: they edge towards the piano naturally as part of their working process. The result of such sketch-learning and dance movement training is hearing and seeing better, partly because the business of practical learning draws us into detail, highlighting distinctions within the choreography far more than distanced watching allows. We also feel more strongly the dynamics and drama of music and movement, grasping information that film sources, and especially those that are poor quality or in long shot, tend to disguise.

It would seem important for analysts to keep in touch with the live theatre experience of dance in other ways. For instance, we might remind ourselves of the *intended experience* of a dance as an audience member at a dance performance, probably seeing a piece once only, all the way through without a break, allowing certain moments to be forgotten while others are remembered. A dance work is an evolving whole. Furthermore, seeing a work only once, we might not be aware of what is a mistake as opposed to an acceptable nuance. Over time, I have learnt to avoid reading the musical score until late on during research, and I use it then largely as a means of checking observations. I keep my reactions to sound and visual motion as fresh as possible, undisturbed by the knowledge of the kind of deep structures that come only from close interrogation of a musical score and detailed cross-referencing back and forth. At different times, I watch in silence, or listen without the score, or just read the score by itself. Initial reactions are of the utmost importance. I even stage *forgetting* a dance, leaving breaks between viewings and not getting fixed on just one recorded dance performance (a problem that dance analysts constantly face). In studying Alston's Chopin pieces, I used for the first time the Adobe Creative Cloud Premiere Pro CC2018 software. This enables slowing down the film while locking its music at the normal pitch. It offers an invaluable

check on timing details, showing precise relationships between dance movement events and musical beats, and also revealing movement subtleties. Yet, at the same time, it removes dynamics and the context of a whole phrase. There is a danger that it can start to function like a kind of score, removed from the actual dance.

The analyses that follow address Alston's Chopin pieces in the chronological order of their creation: *Such Longing 1*, *Mazur* and *Such Longing 2*. This enables us to see the development of Alston's choreography across time, including his modifications for *Such Longing 2*. I also address changes in performance over time. My selection of sections for the most detailed attention indicates the range of both the Chopin music used and Alston's responses to it. Solos are the main focus, for they give dancers maximum freedom with timing and opportunities for development across multiple performances.

In the case of Riddick, every performance of *Mazur*, and he danced in every single one from 2015 to 2017, is captured on film, 22 of them in total. Of these I saw 6 live, at different points in *Mazur's* performance history, from the premiere at The Place, London, June 10, 2015 to the penultimate performance at Montclair State University, New Jersey, February 4, 2017. Guided partly by Alston's view on what he thought were the 'best' performances, I selected 9 films of *Mazur* as the basis from which to build my analysis. The clips accompanying this article are from the first two and the last performances: it happens that they are especially good for highlighting difference. I also watched rehearsals live and on film after Alston had completed his choreography. In the case of *Such Longing*, I used two films of the original RADC version of the piece stemming from 2005-6 (with Martin Lawrance performing the opening solo), and four films of the second, NYTB version, *Such Longing 2* (with Steven Melendez in the solo).³⁶ I soon realised that, at least within modern dance, these films offered very rare opportunities to compare multiple performances of a single work and to track historical change in manner of performance. My criterion for the selection of film clips was always to support the most detailed passages of analysis and to follow the demands of complex relations between music and dance. (Annotated musical examples are introduced for similar reasons.) It is important that all the films were made primarily as a company record, for rehearsal and archival purposes. They are invaluable as the clearest accounts available of the dances discussed, but were never intended to be commercial standard films for public dissemination, although permission has been given to illustrate this article with selected clips.

Performing the Choreomusical Analysis

SUCH LONGING 1

1. Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4 Martin Lawrance Solo (see clip 1, 2006)

Martin Lawrance waits upstage right, close to the piano. (Alston thought of him privately as a Chopin figure.) When Ridgway starts to play, Lawrance walks forward into a series of slow moves: an extension of the right leg, a rise on to the toes, a step forward and ballet petit battement (a quick passing of the left leg from back to front at the ankle, gently 'touching' the quavers in the melody), a step sideways. These are all small, under-stated moves, as if marking rather than full-out performing. Lawrance's mood is introspective, rather than forcing our attention. His is the manner of the opening solo of Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering* mentioned in Alston's programme note, the one made for Edward Villella of New York City Ballet. (Later we see Lawrance touch the floor, the

earth, another Villeda signature move). Lawrance's movement gradually becomes more animated, with increasing use of his upper body and arms, suggesting a range of private thoughts and feelings, memories perhaps, a lively, enquiring imagination. As in Villeda's solo too, Lawrance's focus is multi-directional, often upstage, away from the audience, and what we experience from the movement statements seems utterly enigmatic in terms of what exactly is being said or felt.

Just after the movement described, you see Lawrance gently raise his left foot to the knee (to ballet *passé* position) and place it down behind his right foot, and then in the same manner the right foot ending behind the left, two rising and sinking actions, one after the other. You might also notice the clean right angle at the knee each time. These two moments stand out because they visualise (or 'capture') two of the rising/falling one-bar motifs in the music that occur at exactly the same time. They stand out too because they are confirmed by later repetition—the only repetition of its kind in this solo. One-bar structural units, made especially concrete through repetition, are very rare in Alston's Chopin pieces. But perhaps the *passé* connections are especially clear because they occur so early in the whole Mazurka, when our minds are fresh. It is as if the dancer too, at this point, needs to establish some kind of clarity for himself. Otherwise, in the material so far, single movement events hardly register: they are all so 'quiet' (clip 1, cue 0.15-0.42).

Now check back to the discussion of the musical structure in Op. 17, No. 4 (see p. 7). Here below, the opening 8-bar passage (after the introduction) is notated to show the relationship between music and movement:

Example 4 Music example 2, showing the connecting leg moves (in word notes, with arrows linked to the musical notes) and the whole of the Introduction and musical theme A1: bars 1-12

Looking at this solo more broadly, notice that Alston singles out the whole 8-bar musical theme A1 for special treatment, not only at the beginning, but each time it recurs as a return after contrasting material. The same movement prints itself upon the A1 theme each time, except, on the last occasion (clip 1, cue 3.22), the dance material starts a little later than the music, no longer marking the up-down motif simultaneously, and it ends with different movement. As a person, the dancer signifies that he has moved on.

Elsewhere, when the 8-bar musical theme repeats immediately without a break (we hear it four times at the start, for instance, to make a total of 32 bars), there is no recognition of the repeats within the choreography. You could say that Alston relies on the music to provide much of the coherence. You could also say that he wants to stretch the perceptions of his audience. Form, after all, tells a story. But these musical repeats are not exact anyway. Ornamentation provides variety and suggests a rise in speed and energy during the immediate repetitions of A material (as A2). It is to this variation that Alston could be said to respond. Lawrance covers more space, adding a few staccato gestures of the feet and hands, although these are rarely pinned to the ornamentation: theirs is a more subtle response, during the 'gaps' in the melody, and suggesting his own agency. Perhaps as a result of this, we hear the melody even more differently. For most of this Mazurka, Alston favours ongoing continuity, constant change, a wayward approach to patterning material that creates a kind of tension, partly because it challenges our memories. (For some years now, Alston has been master of the long continuous phrase: it is surprising how infrequently you see this kind of phrasing in the broader dance repertory.)

Much of this solo demonstrates an easing into the music and breath-style patterns with the lightest tracing of beat. Dance counts would be distracting in this context. The major exception here is the central section C (clip 1, cue 2.23-3.21), with its drone bass supporting allusions to Polish folk style and a sense of containment: a brief pattern of simple on-beat steps closed into stillness, feet parallel, creating regular 2-bar units to predominantly 2-bar units in the music (the music is regularly 2+2, followed by a 4-bar unit). Also contained is the upper body language, with Lawrance's hands simply on one hip or behind his waist. Yet this material too starts to loosen up after a while and, as the section draws to a close, there is a sudden emotional outburst, a crescendo with enlarged gesticulations. To one of the big musical accents, Lawrance dives head first towards the floor, one leg flying up behind him.

There is another choreomusical surprise during the last part of this Mazurka soliloquy. The final two bars of the concluding Section A2 are suddenly played loudly, although there is no indication of a change in Chopin's score, nor are there signs of dynamic change in other musical recordings that I randomly consulted online.³⁷ The result is to end-weight, and thus re-balance, this particular musical return. Adding to the effect of this unexpected eruption, Lawrance performs a sudden big leap sideways followed by an *entrechat trois* (clip 1, cue 3.51). It is as if Alston wanted to maintain visual pressure here, and he continues to do so through much of the ensuing Coda. Lengthy visual duplication of low tension in music—Op. 17, No. 4 is Kallberg's example of the diffusion of tension in a Coda more characteristic of Chopin's Nocturnes (see p.8)—might have lost the attention of the audience. The four *perdendosi*, 'dying away', bars that conclude the Coda are allocated to Lawrance's exit, a series of bows, gentle echo of similar bows earlier, and quiet acknowledgement of the next dancer's arrival.

2.Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2 Duet (see clip 2, 2006)

The opening Mazurka is followed by a solo to the Nouvelle Etude No. 1 and then the first of the two Nocturnes (the one with Coda figuration bearing a marked resemblance to that of the Mazurka). Given the fluidity and lavish ornamentation of the Nocturne genre, bear in mind that the following structural diagram is a gross oversimplification of actual experience.

A B transition A B transition (including the main climax) A B Coda

My choreomusical analysis refers to the RADC version of *Such Longing*. Surprisingly, the choreography ignores not only the single introductory bar of the musical accompaniment (which happens frequently in choreography) but also the first bar of the musical theme. The dancing begins in the second bar of the theme (in bar 3). Thus, Alston softens the entrance of the music and perhaps hints at an independent voice starting up in a soundless canon. Sonja Peedo (who took Riga's role in the 2006 film) seems lost in thought. Jonathan Goddard, the 'voice' from behind, gently leads her into the dance, which is immediately complex: with impulsive shifts side to side, disconnections in order to re-connect, and an overall gathering of momentum and growing intensity of physical proximity.

This duet is primarily a dance about her and about her telling him a story of oppositions. There is her need to hold him fast and to be held, to throw herself powerfully into the conversation and yet to relinquish control, dropping back flat into Goddard's arms, time and again, or lying against him in *plié*, her legs forming the sharp angles of a diamond. We see her arm stretching in arabesque like an arrow, sliding along the full length of his. Then, as they lock together, they push into the music

creating an acceleration, with a swipe of his leg to the side, followed by hers swung across his, as if a knife, and then her swoop into a huge vertical penché arabesque. The particular pressure of this move into a familiar ballet position, which seems to stretch out the musical timing, makes it highly expressive of Peedo's strong feelings. Finally, she drops back flat and unfurls herself over his knee, the ripple of her spine extending down through her arm to the floor, filling out the last gasps of the musical phrase (bar 9, clip 2, cue 0.12-1.08) and once more conveying a thrilling intensity.

The movement in this Nocturne seems to follow its own patterns of wave and impulse, folding over and around the music, and *together*, choreography and music make a new, compelling statement recalling Mackrell's image of 'an almost flayed engagement with the music' (see p. 2). Together, the pair convey a wonderful impetuosity, the autonomy of the dancers driving the momentum forwards, racing, it seems, to fit in a lot of information before the music calls a halt, then, once more, allowing musical time to share responsibility.

The second time that we see it, this opening dance statement is fused again with musical theme A (bar 26, clip 2, cue 2.16),³⁸ but, for the third and last time, Alston gives us a mere fragment of the statement and radically re-orders his ideas (bar 46, clip 2, cue 3.33). What was initially Peedo stopping to meditate and Goddard's gentle entry to lead her into the dance is now her rush to strike the long, flat arabesque beside him, to take control. Meanwhile, Ridgway plays fortissimo, another example of countering what is written in the score (see p. 12). There is an intriguing story here. The start of that final return is bolder than ever before. But does this stretching of the concept of return make it hardly recognisable as such? While Riga shows her strength, does the structural change undermine this? Or does it express the material in a new, more adventurous light? Then Alston plunges backwards into his material to reiterate the diamond motif. As in the previous Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4, this final return is brief, giving way to further development of ideas, just as the music veers into new harmonic territory.

Ex. 5 Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2, music for theme A, first appearance with dance movement notes. Opening bars 1-9.

Selective note 'capture' features strongly during this duet. The climactic second transition, leading directly into the last recurrence of musical Theme A, is cast as an eccentric, explosive solo for Goddard--the only time that he usurps our attention--circling his arms impatiently, springing upwards, then, seizing the musical accents on a high G, diving low towards us--diving twice in tension with those high notes. Now, suddenly, on the third and even bigger accent, there is a reversal, so high hits high (clip 2, cue 3.07-3.36). Alston also matches the brief telescoping of musical rhythm here, which makes more urgent the drive towards climax.

Ex. 6 Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2, music for the climax, leading to the third occurrence of Theme A. The five high musical accents, all marked by the choreography, are ringed.

In the Coda, over a tonic pedal, the dance tempo slows considerably, which means that we, the audience, can hover over detail. Still, she drops back into his arms, once, twice, even three times, reminders of earlier tension. Finally, both take a gentle promenade around the stage until a rising scale passage sets them sailing as if in free timing through a series of circling lifts. At last, they have achieved a peaceful resolution. In the silence, we see her stretching along his arm one last time, and they leave the stage. What happens between dances is also important in *Such Longing*.

3.Nocturne Op. posth. 72 Duet

In the shorter Nocturne that follows, the musical structure is as follows:

A B A (including the main climax) B

Again, this diagram is an over-simplification of actual experience, disregarding the complexity of the score and the increasing proliferation of ornamentation. In the second 'half', there is a main climax (with two high accents, the second higher than the first). Alston transforms this Nocturne into another very personal duet (for Lawrance and Francesca Romo), but the relationship between this couple seems easier, less dramatic than in the other Nocturne. The choreography also appears much less motif-led, or front-heavy, and even less inclined towards matching musical repetition with dance repetition. Alston's project seems instead to be about settling us during the two B Sections. Here, both times, the dancers withdraw calmly upstage, side by side, easing into plié as if embedding themselves, although they finally split apart. Both times, the music starts pianissimo. The second time, with an extended ending, it remains quiet for longer. Set to different music, this duet will be discussed again later.

4.Two Etudes and a Prelude

The three other dances in *Such Longing* are structured very differently from the Nocturnes, led by Chopin's comparative brevity and fundamentally monothematic approach. Alston's solo for Luke Baio allows Chopin's Nouvelle Etude to take major responsibility for organic, unified structure, although, within the choreography, there are a couple of recurring gestures, a shoulder ripple and an arm darting vertically downwards, piercing the space. The Prelude stands out as more darkly dramatic than any other part of *Such Longing*. Francesca Romo and Baio, a new pairing, accelerate into a tempestuous cadenza passage and then stop abruptly with a halt in the piano accompaniment. Here is another occasion where Alston elects to go well beyond Chopin's written intentions, by stretching out this hiatus, even more so at later performances. The two dancers stand off against each other and the halt dramatizes their situation. At the end, they depart separately. The final Etude is Alston's abbreviated recapitulation of the whole of *Such Longing*, featuring the various castings for the different dances while, to this new music, a sequence of easily recognisable movements from the past sweeps from right to left across our vision. Especially distinct and another example of 'capture', dynamically enhancing the moment in the score, Riga rushes to strike her arm in arabesque along Goddard's arm (from the first Nocturne). This is a 'classical'-style ending, a wrapping-up that also confirms a clear musical pulse and brings Alston's dance work full circle. At the very end, Lawrance takes a by now very familiar slow bow, upstage beside the piano, where *Such Longing* began. Recalling his secret identity: 'They all leave, but Chopin stays behind' is how Alston reads the conclusion.

MAZUR

Seven Mazurkas: An Introduction

Ten years after *Such Longing* premiered, *Mazur* gave Alston wings. He made the piece rapidly, inspired by Jonathan Goddard and Liam Riddick, two of the finest male dancers around. Immediately, the intricate footwork of *Mazur*, with its new rhythmic subtleties, strikes you as

different from the style of *Such Longing*. Alston had begun to borrow more ideas from classical ballet's canon of steps by this time, and particularly their precise reference to beat. As well as an exceptionally diverse vocabulary, there are more points of distinction in Alston's imagery than usual: sharp and snaky arms, worrying gestures of avoidance, magic little jumps snatching the feet up underneath the body, countless variations on the presto turn, and frequent tumult in full-body plunges that get subverted, redirected and passed like messages between the two men. At the same time, in the single slow duet to Mazurka Op. 41, No. 2, the most gentle and loving duets for two men that I know, their torsos melt quietly and generously into each other.

Across seven Mazurkas, three duets and four solos,³⁹ the emotional range in *Mazur* is considerable, especially for Riddick (Chopin), who introduces extreme distinctions between pensiveness and sudden bursts of passionate feeling. But the piece as a whole is an opportunity for the two men to express their friendship as well as individual personalities--as challenge, showing off to each other, and as quiet intimacy. At the start, they are more distant, sizing each other up, occasionally competitive. Later, there are passages that suggest melancholy, even lonely thoughts. Finally, the pair get closer physically and in mood, reaching resolution during the slow duet and super-fast finale. Choreomusical relations play a crucial role in our experience of this narrative. This introductory survey includes analysis of the opening duet. After this, I will examine Riddick's two solos in order to foreground changes in choreomusical relations through their performance history.

All Chopin's Mazurkas in *Mazur* are in the customary form, book-ended by the same primary material (A), with two or more sections of contrasting intervening material. The Coda of the last Mazurka here, Op. 50, No.1 is the longest at 16 bars, appropriate as if it were the Coda of the entire *Mazur*. Otherwise, if there is a Coda at all, it is short. Op. 30, No. 3 closes with one extra bar, a positive tonic chord affirming the friendship between the two men—they shake hands--a sudden, surprising forte after pianissimo, which seems to open up, rather than close, matters. But this is, after all, only the start. Only Op. 50, No. 1 has a more complex structure, a recurrence of A in the centre, as in a Rondo: A B A C A D Coda.

Alston's choreographic structure respects all the major divisions within each Mazurka. The strongest sense of structural division and 'legibility' comes when musical repetition is matched by dance repetition, and it is a much more regular feature in *Mazur* than in *Such Longing*. Given Alston's concern to present his audience with a mixture of challenge and respite, this makes a lot of sense in a work that is quite short, already dense with movement ideas and frequently speedy in delivery. But, significantly, Alston does not begin with straightforward matching of musical repetition.

Let us focus on the first of the outer duets (see clip 3, 2017, the Montclair State University performance, Op. 30, No. 3). Here, the structural divisions include solo passages, and it is noteworthy that this duet is far more complex than the other six dances. Its musical structure, showing duet and solo sections, is as follows:

Introduction (8 bars); A A (32 bars, both dancers, 16 bars repeated); B (Riddick, 16 bars); C (both dancers, 16 bars); D (Goddard, 16 bars); transition (both dancers, 6 bars); A (both dancers, 16 bars); Coda (both dancers, one bar)

The initial repeat of the first Section A (from bar 25) is treated with totally different choreography. On the other hand, its return at the end of the dance (this time without immediate repeat) treats ideas from the original Section A choreography in a new way, in a kind of reverse order of what we

originally saw. Alston starts with material from bar 31, the middle of the initial Section A repeat, incorporates two bars of stillness as the men stand, looking at each other, and then ends with the beginning of the whole dance. Such re-organisation means that the movement fits the music in an entirely different way, in this case, no longer visualising its rhythms, even though regularly articulating beat. Consider now how Alston keeps us on edge with new information throughout this first dance, after which he makes things much easier for us. This is quite different from the final duet, which constitutes Rondo form in both dance and music, the three-times matching 16 bars of primary material contributing to its firm resolution.⁴⁰

Perhaps the biggest point of structural difference between music and dance in the opening duet lies in the organisation of material into smaller units within sections. This difference may have happened simply because dance ideas need more time than musical ideas to register or unfold, but this is also a sign of the different structural approaches of Chopin and Alston. Take again the first 16 bars of Section A in the music. Most of this passage can be broken down into units of one or two bars. Across this, Alston unfolds a single, unpredictable, line of moves (with just one brief spot of repetition) and then, when we hear all 16 bars of music again, he introduces a new set of moves, again, none of which is repeated. Alston works with Chopin's miniature parsing of time very sparingly.

Take another look at the first, immediate repeat of Section A in the music. Here are several examples of unusually subtle counterpoint and visualisation. Consider the frequent sliding in and out of synchronisation between the two men, who sometimes do totally different movements, sometimes relating antiphonally, often showing contrasting dynamic qualities: sharp, robust, gentle, slippery, precise, and so on. With each rapid shift of tactics, our eyes forced to dart around from one man to the other, we might experience a sense of 'quick lift', the surprise and refreshment of contradiction.⁴¹ The actual rhythm pattern that each dancer creates highlights at different times and to different effect different beats of the bar. Such choreomusical tactics make a major contribution to the expression of playful repartee, firm friendship, but with a component of teasing and competition. The men often look across the stage and check out what the other is doing.

Ex. 7 shows both men's dance lines to this repeat of Section A. Look how different they are from each other and from the musical rhythm line alongside (clip 3, cue 0.48-1.12.) We can also distinguish where they are in total unison (marked in the example) and dancing the same steps (bars 31-33), from where they are only in rhythmic unison and dancing different steps (bars 34-36). Their syncopations after ties over the bar-line tell a story. It is as if the men 'hang' or suspend over the musical bar-line, enjoying drawing out the end of one bar into the downbeat of the one that follows. Here is an instance where the analytical act of notation revealed the intricacy of Alston's movement structures. But musical rhythmic notation is woefully inadequate in conveying the full dynamic liveliness of such a passage of choreography.

There is a moment during the last four bars when Chopin smooths out the dotted rhythm in his melody. First time round, the dancers' response at this point was silky, smoothing over the rhythm pattern (clip 3, cue 0.42). Second time, on the musical repeat, Riddick catches the rhythm very exactly with quick steps, right-left-right (quaver-quaver-crotchet): the coincidence stands out for its precision and rarity (bar 37, clip cue 1.06). Did Alston want us to hear this special moment in the music more clearly? Alston enjoys small things. In fact, he did not choreograph this particular change. This time, Riddick got to hear it and used it, and Alston is entirely happy about this. (He has decided to keep it for future revivals.)

Ex. 7 Music with dance rhythm notated—using musical rhythmic notation Op. 30, No. 3, bars 25-40 (notated from June 2016 film (archived as 30th edit))

This is a fleeting example of music visualisation, where dance movement pulls out for attention a musical feature happening at the same time. But this kind of relationship does not have to be simultaneous in order to register. There is an instance near the end of the final duet when both dancers in unison dip towards the floor, extending one leg up and back in arabesque only to subvert that image by bringing the same leg quickly down and forwards. During the 2017 performance, both dancers (Riddick and Nicholas Bodych) do this *before* we hear the corresponding up and down in the music. But we still register the anticipation as such, or the music as an echo. At least one other performance shows the up and down patterns simultaneously. What is most interesting is that we sense a genuine connection in both situations and, again, a 'quick lift'. At other times, in the moment of performance, dancers can change the way they do things: they wittingly or unwittingly make connections of different kinds. Sometimes too, Alston choreographs a connection in rehearsal and then removes it as his choreography develops in new directions.

Elsewhere in *Mazur*, Goddard's solos bring out other details, like the series of accents in Op.7, No. 3 at the end of every second bar (on beat 3). In the first solo, these are marked by a hand on the shoulder or behind the waist, or the arms form a circle, or a leg extends, always something you do not expect. It is as if these gestures get 'caught' by the light musical stresses—or the other way round—which makes them intriguing. Curiously, these movements draw us in to detail. Are they really there? Do we notice some of them simply because a pattern has been established and it lingers in the memory? Could some of the musical accents seem longer than they actually are? Fascinating questions about perception. Such subtle passing accents are unusual in the dance repertory. (Bodych's interpretation, which is deliciously understated, introduces further variety of nuance.) In Goddard's second solo, to Op. 68, No.1, the musical accents are much more powerful. Alston recognises them at the start and at the point of return, but otherwise leaves them alone—we might forget about them—while he goes off to explore other rhythmic business. The dancer remains beyond capture, darting, pausing, reaching, twisting, darting somewhere else—and perhaps Alston's penchant for riding over seams means that when musical accents and metre do meet each other smartly, there is a major pleasure of sudden recognition.

The intimate slow duet to Op. 41, No. 2 is exceptional. Its languorous continuity masks the musical divisions. You may not notice the moment of choreographic return near the end—it is not signalled as a structural marker—for the dancers here seem to pass freely through their familiar moves, fitting the music at a totally different point, just a few bars before it draws to a close. Prior to this, the duet is haunted by tolling, high D sharps—53 in total, none of which is marked out by the choreography—Alston lets rhythmic detail dissolve. The D sharps hover precariously over the two men, their repetition increasing their poignancy. Sometimes you might sense a deep movement pulse at bar level, and, at one point, in a series of steps, there is a fleeting nod back to beat. Otherwise, how the movement fits mechanical concepts of rhythm or the look of the score becomes irrelevant. The rhythm of breath plays the biggest part in this mazurka: 'They breathe with the rise and fall of the music,' Alston explains, 'and instinctively adjust if Jason does something different. That's the best way to describe it.' And, he adds, 'the duet clings on to the music.' At this point, we turn to further detail in Riddick's two soliloquies, and we can be guided by Alston's singling him out as 'a listening dancer'.

Mazurkas Op. 33, No. 1 and Op. 67, No. 2 Two Liam Riddick Solos (clips 4-8, 2015 and 2017)

For Riddick's two solos in *Mazur*, I reference for comparison the premiere performances at The Place Theatre, June 10, 2015 for solo 1 and June 11 for solo 2 (clips 4-5), and the penultimate performance, at Montclair State University, February 4, 2017, for both solos 1 and 2 (clips 6-8). But first an introduction to the two solos. Here, I examine both the choreography and its performance history, acknowledging that no single performance can ever be exactly the same as any other. In this regard, some small measure of change might be a mistake and unintended in the moment of performance, or unintended but retained as useful for a future occasion, or simply not recognised by the performer. But change always says something. Adobe premiere pro has been enlightening here in terms of precise differences in timing.

1.Solo 1, Op. 33, No. 1, Mesto (A B C A) (clips 4-6):

'Mesto' means 'sad'. On this occasion, before watching Alston's choreography with a view towards detailed analysis, I listened to a variety of recordings. Nothing prepared me for the shock of seeing the dance again after a long break. What had seemed a restrained musical statement in recording, part-dreamy, part-intellectual, was now shot through with Riddick's violent bursts of emotion, embedded within multiple twists and turns. The musical identity seemed to have shifted to become a force of friction, movement and sound pulling against each other. This is a kind of interaction that is absent from any of the examples so far discussed.

Slow/moderate tempo is initially shared. The music of Section A is structured as 4 +(4+4) = 12 bars, with the repeat of bars 5-8 as bars 9-12. With the quiet insecurity of bars 3-4, the opening seems to express private thought rather than action, no major turbulence as yet. Riddick's body gradually opens out spatially and into multiple facing directions. At the premiere, he started with a hand over his eyes, a blinding gesture that would have stressed the introversion, but Alston felt that this strong image did not link logically with what followed and he soon edited it out. A twisting movement forward and back of the shoulders as Riddick deepens into a lunge signals closure (bars 7 and 11), complementing the repetition of the last four bars of music.

It is in the centre of the solo (Sections B, bars 13-20 and C, bars 21-36) that the choreography turns *allegro/presto*. But the music does not, nor does it rise in energy via other means. This centre is a fine illustration of Mackrell's imagery in her 2015 review when she describes Riddick as a 'mercurial' creature and refers to the 'arrowy lines' of his arms: taut, crossing like scissors, or, at one point, shooting vertically overhead to the highest note of the melody line. The reader is encouraged to explore the effect of tension with the music by turning the film sound off and then back on again. Still, however, we see movements accenting different beats at different times, with or against the musical accentuation. Section C ends (bars 32-33) with a rapid retreat backwards up the diagonal, a rare point when you can literally hear Riddick's footfall between the notes.

In this first solo, there is a tiny change that you would hardly notice in live performance. Watch Riddick's raised leg coming out of the turn and taking a step (bars 9-11), then the same move when this music repeats. Riddick falls gently out of the turn with different timings in different performances. This is demonstrated in clips of three performances--two from 2015 (clips 4 and 5), one from 2017 (clip 6), each showing the repeat, in other words, six times in all--where the falling step recurs on or during the third beat of bar 10, or later, on the downbeat of bar 11, while Ridgway adds extra stretch with his own rubato. (The cues for each clip are, first time round, c.33 and, on the return, 1.44 (clip 4) and 1.49 (clips 5 and 6).) Much depends on how Riddick is balanced in the

moment of performance, but even here, there is an expressive suggestion of opposites, like resistance/letting go, uncertainty/pleasure in relaxation, as well as the obvious up/down, tension/release, air/earth binaries. In the same solo, as introduction to a long diagonal from the downstage corner (bars 32-33), Riddick steps up on beat 1 and drops forward heavily on beat 2, the accented note. But in the 2017 film, the only occasion where this happens, he steps up later, on the accented beat 2, following the rise in pitch, and dropping forwards on the unaccented beat 3, to considerably lighter effect.

2.Solo 2, Op. 67, No.2, Cantabile (A B C A) (clips 7-8):

In Section A, Riddick finds different ways of smoothing over the musical seams, defying closure and ‘hanging’ over the bar-line. At one point, he hops backwards, which Ridgway has described as ‘through the music’—while he continues playing regardless. Then, as the same musical theme repeats (bar 9), something very striking, even bizarre, happens. He launches himself across the stage into a huge, un-classical cabriole, throwing his legs upwards before him and beating them together majestically (as in the traditional ballet step), but here with his arms free and the physical work highlighted. He anticipates the music as if urged on by feeling—he cannot wait for Chopin to catch up with him (clip 7, June 11, 2015, cue 0.34-41 and, in the recapitulation of Section A, 2.00-2.11). To be musical means many different things, and here, Alston and Riddick have created their own ‘great crescendo crashing headlong into hushed reverie’. Again, the choreography operates in tension with the music, which it seems to leave behind, while the music itself does not suggest the choreographic overwhelm. Alston takes the movement off into an orbit of its own.

A very taut Section B follows (bars 17-32): an abrupt step-and-close pattern to a grace note followed by a dotted minim, then a hold (two bars), all of this again (two bars), then a continuous dance phrase just as the music starts to flow (four bars). (The short-unit structure resembles that of the drone bass section in Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4). Another total change of mood: Section C (bars 33-40) is like time out. To a lonely melody line, Riddick simply walks quietly across the stage, thinking and listening.

Let us return now to the detail of that lively cabriole phrase in the second solo (see Ex. 8). Two different performances of this are included with this article, the second performance (clip 7) and the penultimate performance (clip 8). Each allows us to see the cabriole phrase twice. As a reference point, consider the melodic peak here of B flat (in the middle of bar 14) and the start of the scale-wise descent that follows as we approach the end of Section A. With one exception, following the cabriole on the B flat an octave lower (on the downbeat of bar 14), Riddick marks this peak (the high B flat or the A immediately after it) with a bold gesture of his left arm. This is followed in quick succession by a ripple of his right arm down the front of his body. During the 2017 performance (clip 8), the cabrioles are smaller and the emphasis is more on these arm gestures, which now seem majestic. Riddick whips his left arm up impatiently to accent the B flat more forcefully and, the second time round, the cabriole comes earlier, in bar 13, increasing the sense of impatience. But in the 2015 performance, there is a more distinct difference between first and second times round, a sense of growth. Second time round, it is the cabriole, now timed later than before, that coincides with the B flat peak in bar 14. Riddick then keeps the height of his upper leg and maintains the upward emphasis, which is consequently taken over by the left arm on the first note G of the following bar 15, seeming to pull him back into the music. The effect is quite different. The upward stress, or in-breath, is especially drawn out in this version, and I remember gasping when I encountered this particular emphasis.

Ex. 8 Last 8 bars of Section A with word notes indicating dance timings

Alston confirms that he did not choreograph the phrase that way with the upward stress (and he did not recall that it ever happened again like this), but neither did he say that what materialised was wrong. It seems that the key governing factor is the integrity of the full, big sweep of energy from the moment that Riddick launches himself across the stage to the end of the musical cadence. This seems to be a landmark feature of Alston's choreomusical style: allowing rhythmic detail to shift more than most other choreographers would wish, encouraging subtle changes of relation to musical beat and bar-line as movement phrases breathe within performance.⁴² Yet it is crucial that Alston works with dancers he knows well and whom he has nurtured (trained) to move so organically, and thus convincingly, in a manner that surprises and delights him.

As for *Mazur*, temporarily, at least, Alston has, at this point during the creative process, let go of his choreography—he trusts his dancers and loves to see them 'taking it away'—and handed responsibility over to Riddick and Ridgway. The upward stress is not an isolated instance: other Alston films provide evidence of many other nuances of this kind.

SUCH LONGING 2

1. Mazurka Op. 68, No. 2 Duet

When the opportunity to stage a second version of *Such Longing* came from NYTB, Alston decided to rework his original RADC version and incorporate selected dances from *Mazur*. Part of this reworking involved rethinking radically an existing piece of choreography, to the Nocturne Op. posth 72 in E minor, by re-setting it to another, very different piece of music, the Mazurka, Op. 68 No. 2 in A minor. In any case, Alston wanted more mood change between his duets, less of the 'sad' Chopin.

The choreography is now presented next to what is perhaps Chopin's most repetitive Mazurka, a very spare piece, with barely any ornamentation, and super-strict in the hierarchical construction of its structural units. 'It provides variety within the piece,' rationalises Alston. 'It's a mazurka rhythm with a different sharper accent which I loved.' We hear the A theme in exactly the same form six times, and, even though there is a strong case for A B A form, there are unusually strong similarities here between the A and B material. In short, this Mazurka could not be much more different from the original Nocturne. American choreographer Mark Morris selected the same Mazurka for his one and only Chopin setting *Sang-froid* (2000) and chose to make a not-so-gentle joke about its repetitive nature.⁴³ His response was to use just as much repetition in his own choreography, in other words, to do a very obvious music visualisation. Alston does quite the opposite, letting the music operate as a relatively stable ground and introducing his freer rhythms, together with just a few cross-references linking the different sections of his choreography. These cross-references stand out much less than they do in the original Nocturne setting, partly because the visual experience is now more packed, a dense stream of contrasting ideas. Only the climax relieves perceptual challenge, when, just before the final recapitulation of A, the woman slows down into gentle bourrées (on pointe) around the man and then he supports her to drift into a sequence of lifts. The third and last of these lifts takes her high overhead before she descends serenely towards the musical cadence—one more occasion where Alston pauses, over the final chord, a big one-bar pause, without any written suggestion from Chopin.

Alston is not the first choreographer to change his musical selection while keeping his own choreography, nevertheless, this practice is unusual. The limitations as well as opportunities offered by a score change can be stimulating. A new choice of music is pretty much guaranteed to open up new, unexpected, unforced choreomusical relationships or interactions. It is fascinating to see here, for instance, how Alston shows both soft and stressed connections between his choreography and the characteristic upturn in pitch (the leap of an octave) at the end of each 8-bar phrase: with a low lift or gentle wave of the arms, or, much bigger, an enthusiastic relevé with leg extension or triumphant attitude on pointe. In such circumstances, a little engineering is likely to be required in order to clarify the dynamic shape of the new dance or release an interesting point of contact with the music. Alston did a little of this, adding the bourrées for instance, and contracting the latter half of the original choreography to fit a much shorter score. (He worked on this process from London in online contact with Lawrance in New York, who began the re-staging of *Such Longing*.) But this ‘experiment’ also suggests that, like the freedoms in dance *performance* mentioned earlier, the very nature of Alston’s *choreography* allows it to sit in different ways alongside its music. Compared with the original Nocturne setting, there is a general lightening of demeanour in this new dance—the dancers occasionally smile at each other. But there are times when the choreography seems too crowded, too ‘hard to see’ for its own good. This could be one of Alston’s least ‘legible’ dances.

2. Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4 Steven Melendez Solo (see clip 9, 2018)

Another striking feature of *Such Longing 2* was the development of the opening Mazurka solo, now danced by Steven Melendez. After Lawrance had taught the solo to Melendez, Alston made several alterations and encouraged from the dancer himself further ideas about movement content and style, dynamics, narrative drive, and coordination with the music. Melendez’s ideas went on developing as he continued to perform the solo (far more than Riddick’s in his solos). ‘He has made it very, very much his own’, said Alston as he introduced the dance during the David Vaughan Memorial celebration in New York, in January, 2018. (Here, as well as in a number of NYTB performances, the solo and first duet (for Melendez and Amanda Treiber) were presented as a separate dance work.) When I saw film footage of the NYTB production, I hardly recognized the 2015 Mazurka, that it was the same dance as the 2005 solo. 2016 and 2018 recordings were the foundation for the analysis that follow and can be compared with Lawrance’s 2006 performance of the solo, as described earlier.

Melendez’s ballet training encouraged Alston to introduce more verticality in postural emphasis and jumps, including more big ballet beats--cabrioles and entrechats--and more extended turns (now easier in ballet shoes). In contrast, small-scale footwork stands out more clearly than before, such as toe taps and foot gestures printed between musical notes. There are also minor changes in the order of moves and a few choreographic additions. Three new gestures register especially clearly. One is a hand raised diagonally forwards, quietly. Another is a raised palm, down into which Melendez looks intently. A coincidence, he had danced in Limon’s setting (in *Mazurkas*, 1958/restaged 1985) of the same Mazurka, which also featured this image. At another point, Melendez puts his hand on the ‘earth’, a gesture to the past that, he says, reminded him of Villella’s solo in *Dances at a Gathering*.

Like the RADC dancers, all the NYTB dancers had been told the story of the Polish war and Chopin’s loss of homeland. From an interview that I had with Melendez, it was obvious that he fielded several narrative threads.

Almost every single movement has a literal narrative going in my head... There's a moment near the end where I have a big jump and I'm angry at that moment. And I'm angry that things are the way they are in the world. I sort of go through this schizophrenic narrative for almost every step in that solo in a way that I don't do for any other ballet that I perform. It's very strange. Like many thoughts, the thoughts are not always linear.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most intriguing imagery came from his conception of NYTB pianist Michael Scales as Chopin playing his own music.

That particular piece is literally about the pianist and it's like his life story. Which makes the music even that much more integral to the piece in terms of how it's performed and what the piece means. It's the difference between listening to Chopin playing his own music, and someone else playing Chopin's music... What's not written in the score has a lot more meaning. A piece that is about the pianist is really special.

At the same time, Scales was his alter ego:

I accept that he is a part of me. Often I start with my hand on the piano...so I'm a part of it, before I begin anything.

Yet Scales looks directly at Melendez much less than Ridgway did at his dancers.⁴⁵

The 2018 film reveals further subtle developments of a choreomusical nature. Here, all three occurrences of the opening musical material are treated differently: Melendez recalls Alston being absolutely adamant that at least one of these should *not* be *on* the music. But there are other notable changes. Let us consider once again the detail of the opening Section A for differences between the 2018 performance and that of Lawrance in 2006, in chronological order:

1. Melendez delays the lead up to the two passés, so the petit battement happens just after the notes picked out by Lawrance, after which he catches up with the music (see Ex. 4).
2. Lawrance suggests two distinct moves in bars 11-12, whereas Melendez links this material into what seems like a single longer move.
3. The drop forwards of Melendez's upper body in bar 17 is a larger movement (his dropping moves are generally more exaggerated than those of Lawrance).
4. Melendez gets ahead of Lawrance in the lead up to the cadence in bar 20.
5. In bar 25, Melendez dives towards the floor, hands first, so sharply that he connects with the downbeat—a surprise attack—whereas Lawrance makes the move legato and much 'quieter', and it takes up the whole bar.

All in all, in this passage, and in the solo as a whole, Melendez operates with far more extreme dynamics than Lawrance. He races through the musical rhythms towards his accented moments, making such moments seem much bigger, some even frenzied. The choreography becomes a series of eruptions moderated by moments of restrained intensity, and the eruptions become more marked as the solo progresses, not always matched by the musical dynamics. This surely supports his private layers of narrative. The end of his final theme A material prior to the Coda is even 'louder' here than in Lawrance's performance, turned into a gigantic leap sideways and a multiple entrechat, with high energy lasting longer. These dynamics had already started to appear in the 2016 Melendez film, there, with a further surprise, a full two-bar pause when he simply stood still (bars 103-4).⁴⁶

All these changes work within the framework of relative rhythmic freedom and flow, as Melendez observes:

Outside the measure markers of the music, one bit of energy goes through a handful of steps... In Richard's work, there's a [style of] movement phrase that lets the energy go past the music and that's OK.

Melendez stresses that Alston wanted to give him creative freedom:

Richard has given me very wide discretion to perform the solo as I feel it in the moment. I'm very grateful to him for that. (However, often, he has said 'that's not quite right'.)

At this point, in performing it, I don't feel particularly obligated to anything except staying connected with Michael. That is what is important. Not to be musically on a note but in the feeling. If Michael is swelling...in a crescendo...I want to be sure that I'm matching that in my movement. And if he sees me really going for a turn...or a jump...or really deeply into a plié really staring at my hand, he'll slow down for me and I appreciate that. It's more like a duet I would call it than a solo.

Melendez also perceives a stream of impulses crossing music and dance, a symbiotic relationship between the audio and the visual, as if movement can sound:

There's a way I think that movement can make noise. You can watch somebody jump and you swear that you heard a crash in the cymbals. Watching that jump gave you that impression.

Alongside my previous discussions with Alston and Ridgway, my interview with Melendez proved highly revealing. But several further questions arise: which new ideas came from Melendez and which came from Alston in rehearsal with Melendez? Alston says that he especially admired the 2018 performance. So what happens in the next revival? Which version is the primary source? 'It depends on the new dancer,' says Alston, suggesting his appreciation that each dancer has an individual choreomusical performance style. Interviews to date suggest that more in-depth ethnographic work of this kind would be invaluable. Whereas there are still major debates about the part that knowledge of process and artistic intention should play within the interpretation of artworks, artists certainly help us ask pertinent analytical questions and draw our attention to what is unnoticed or misunderstood.

Alston and Chopin: A Summary

We now return to the questions that opened this article, and first to those about Chopin's music. Clearly, it is coloured by the Alston dance context here: his individual expression of what it is to be human, ranging between the extremes of deep emotion and subtle gentility, encompassing engagement between men—with Chopin a kind of shadow character—as well as between men and women. Alston also gives Chopin a break from romance and sweet sentiment and foregrounds his strangeness as well as robust and dark qualities. At the same time, the composer takes the choreographer forwards in offering him particular historical, harmonic and rhythmic contexts—memories of other dances and dancing—that inspire in him an expanded language of gesture and accent.

Through Alston, we can appreciate too the creative urge to move a work of choreography onwards, as his dancers play a crucial role in maintaining its energy and renewing it for the future. That seems particularly powerful in the performance progress of *Such Longing* and, given its already varied history, we might ask: will this work ever be 'finished'?

That said, this article has begun to identify a particular choreomusical style in Alston's work. This involves a wide range of tactics, which in itself distinguishes his work from that of many other choreographers and that grounds our understanding of his broader repertoire. Of particular note is

his contribution to rhythmic and expressive freedom within astutely marked boundaries. The diversity and fluency of his rhythmic strategies are remarkable, so much so that the smallest, subtlest procedure can give rise to a surprisingly powerful result. He actively invites change in his own particular way: by controlling *and* letting go, challenging *and* simplifying, letting things happen—‘happy accidents’—*and* stealing chance occurrences for future use.

Researching Alston, I am reminded that the subject of dance structure and style and their relation to music is frequently ignored in today’s dance research. But these features are not dry, schematic phenomena. We can experience a tremendous aesthetic thrill when getting to know something rigorously wrought as well as moving, meaningful and intellectually stimulating in other ways. That has surely been said many times about Chopin’s music, but, for similar reasons, we can now say it about Alston, who is one of the composer’s finest choreographers.

¹ In contrast, a huge body of valuable music theory addresses this topic of structure.

² See, for instance, Jim Samson, *Chopin (The Master Musicians series)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996); Halina Goldberg, ed., *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Inquiries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Alan Walker, *Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018).

³ Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, Chapter 3, “Small Fairy Voices”, pp. 62-86.

⁴ Eric J. McKee, *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz: A Study of Dance-Music Relations in 3/4 Time* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011).

⁵ Marianne Kielian-Gilbert, “Chopiniana and Music’s Contextual Allusions”, in Halina Goldberg, ed., *The Age of Chopin: Interdisciplinary Enquiries*, pp. 162-200.

⁶ During the 1970s, the first decade of Alston’s career, a major concern of his was to make strong movement in its own right—indeed, he often choreographed in silence using music in the manner of film music, as a soundscape—but music was always important to him. See Jordan, *Striding Out: Aspects of Contemporary and New Dance in Britain* (London: Dance Books, 1992): Chapter 5, “Richard Alston,” pp. 105-30.

⁷ There is a section called ‘Chopin’ in Schumann’s *Carnaval* and Alston alludes privately to his own Chopin pieces at this point in his 2017 setting of the *Carnaval* score.

⁸ Alston also admires Michel Fokine’s *Les Sylphides*, especially its pas de deux. Unless otherwise indicated, in this article, all personal information about Alston stems from email communications and conversations with him between 2015 and 2019.

⁹ Judith Mackrell, “Richard Alston: Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury”, *The Guardian*, February 17, 2005.

¹⁰ Barbara Milewski, “Chopin’s Mazurkas and the Myth of the Folk”, *19th-Century Music*, 23/2 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 113-135.

¹¹ Directed by Diana Byer, New York Theatre Ballet has achieved acclaim for its revivals of masterworks from both the ballet and contemporary dance repertoires. Alston had already re-mounted for NYTB *Light Flooding into Darkened Rooms* in 2013 and made from scratch *Rugged Flourish* in 2011. In 2018, Alston created *The Seasons* for the company. It is a big step between Alston and ballet styles of movement. Ballet tends not to give into weight or use breath rhythm in the same way. But Alston has long had a profound love of ballet, from seeing Margot Fonteyn as a youth, and he admires especially the choreography of Frederick Ashton. He has often taken aspects from ballet vocabulary into his own company work, especially the intricacy of its steps. He has also made ballets for The Royal Ballet, the Royal Danish Ballet and Ballet Black.

¹² Alston became interested in the work of Merce Cunningham as a student at the London School of Contemporary Dance in the late 1960s, both his choreographic principles and his class technique; see Jordan, *Striding Out*, pp. 26-27.

¹³ Ridgway used the Ignacy Jan Paderewski score editions of Chopin’s music, he told me in interview, June 24, 2015.

¹⁴ The term ‘choreomusical’ was first coined by Paul Hodgins for work crossing music and dance and that is primarily analytical, involving close readings of dance works. See Hodgins, *Relationships Between Score and Choreography in Twentieth-Century Dance: Music, Movement, and Metaphor* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992). For a history and assessment of the choreomusical field, see Jordan, “Choreomusicology and Dance Studies: From Beginning to End”, in Helen Thomas and Stacey Prickett, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 141-156??? **UPDATE WITH REFERENCE TO FINAL PUBLICATION--CURRENTLY IN PRESS (ROUTLEDGE 2020).**

¹⁵ For a summary of tools for choreomusical analysis and related concepts, see Jordan, *Mark Morris: Musician-Choreographer* (Binsted, Hants: Dance Books, 2015), Chapter 4, pp. 91-123. For key texts in film music theory, see Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* [1990], ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*, (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); in intermedia theory, see Lawrence M. Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman and Carol Vernallis, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ For key texts in cognition theory, see Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis*, Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), Arnie Cox, *Music and Embodied Cognition: Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

¹⁷ Theresa Buckland, “In Search of Structural Geist: Dance as Regional and National Identity,” in *Dance Structures: Perspectives on the Analysis of Human Movement*, ed. Adrienne L. Kaeppler and Elsie I. Dunin, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, *Studies in Ethnology* 3, 2007), p. 187.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Kallberg, “The Problem of Repetition and Return in Chopin’s Mazurkas”, in Jim Samson, ed., *Chopin Studies 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23.

¹⁹ Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music, Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 49-52; 90-97. See also Kallberg, “The Problem of Repetition...”, p. 2.

²⁰ Edward T. Cone, “The Picture Gallery: Form and Style”, in *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), pp. 57-87.

²¹ Chopin’s Mazurka Op. 68, No. 1, used in *Mazur*, also opens with a 12-bar phrase.

²² Jeffrey Kallberg, “Hearing Poland: Chopin and Nationalism,” in R. Larry Todd, ed., *Piano Music in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), p. 234.

²³ Kallberg, ‘Hearing Poland’, p. 239.

²⁴ Kallberg, ‘Hearing Poland’, pp. 233-34.

²⁵ Kallberg (1988), p. 16, note 21; see also Samson (1996), p. 117.

²⁶ Zofia Chechlinska, ‘The nocturnes and studies: selected problems of piano texture’, in Jim Samson, ed., *Chopin Studies 1* (1988), p. 160.

²⁷ Alston quoted in Jordan, “Ravel Dances: ‘Choreomusical’ Discoveries in Richard Alston’s *Shimmer*”, in Deborah Mawer, ed., *Ravel Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 167. Yet in interview in 2019, Alston said that he is still assessing the role of repetition and tending to use it more often today for the sake of clarity when the movement is complex. Yet he still worries about working ‘too slavishly’ with musical forms as in music visualization.

²⁸ Alston quoted in Jordan, “Ravel Dances”, p. 173.

²⁹ Jordan, *Striding Out: Aspects of Contemporary and New Dance in Britain* (London: Dance Books, 1992): Chapter 5, “Richard Alston,” pp. 120-28.

³⁰ Jordan, *Striding Out*, p. 120, from Alston, “Two Recent Dances”, *Artscribe*, 16 (February, 1979), p. 44.

³¹ See Jordan, *Mark Morris: Musician-Choreographer* (London: Dance Books, 2015), Ch. 3, ‘Choreomusical History...and the Question of ‘Music Visualisation’, pp. 75-87.

³² See discussion of the ‘freeze phenomenon’ in Jean Vroomen and Beatrice de Gelder, “Sound enhances visual perception: cross-modal effects of auditory organisation on vision,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 26/5 (2000), pp. 1583-90.

³³ Alston interviewed on ‘Just Dancing Around? Richard Alston’, television documentary, director Mark Kidell, producer Debra Hauer (Euphoria Films, Channel 4, 1996).

³⁴ Siobhan Davies and Alston, “Siobhan Davies and Richard Alston in Conversation”, *Dance Theatre Journal*, 15/1 (1999), pp.18-19.

³⁵ In this respect, Alston is much closer to Ashton than Balanchine in style, and thus, being led by melody, he says, gives himself more opportunity for intuition.

³⁶ Two films of *Such Longing 2* are complete (2015, 2016), and there are two further films of Melendez in the solo (one of these incomplete) followed by his duet with Amanda Treiber to the Nocturne Op. 27, No. 2.

³⁷ Vladimir Horowitz does play loudly at this point, an exception, on a 1985 recording: *Vladimir Horowitz plays Chopin Mazurka in A Minor, Opus 17, No. 4*—YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfN5E_cwVcA accessed July 25, 2019.

³⁸ The last two bars appear in ornamented version.

³⁹ Another Chopin piece for piano, his Cantabile, was partly choreographed, but then abandoned.

⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in typical fashion, Alston does not make things entirely straightforward. This is a prestissimo dance and, rather cheekily, for the final repeat, he starts the choreography in its fourth bar, like an afterthought.

⁴¹ I take the image of ‘quick lift’ from the critic Edwin Denby’s description of the nature of surprise and contradiction in his essay on George Balanchine’s *Agon*, ‘Three Sides of *Agon*’: see Denby, in Robert Cornfield and William Mackay, eds., *Dance Writings* (London: Dance Books, 1986), p. 458.

⁴² Watching Alston create a duet for Monique Jonas and Nahum McLean (in his 2019 Benjamin Britten piece *Shine On*) persuaded me that these subtle changes of phrasing sometimes happen during the earliest stages of the making process (October 17, 2019). The duet was choreographed in silence, after which Alston said, ‘Let’s see where we are with the music’. Even at this point, as dance material found its way round the music each time it was tried out, the precise rhythmic relationship between the choreography and the music was left relatively unfixed. Yet Jonas also pointed out in post-rehearsal discussion that Alston does sometimes ask his dancers to fix contact with certain musical notes.

⁴³ See Jordan, “Acts of Transformation: Strategies for Choreographic Interventions in Mark Morris’s Settings of Existing Music”, in Patrizia Veroli and Gianfranco Vinay, eds., *Music-Dance: Sound and Motion in Contemporary Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 76-90.

⁴⁴ Interview with Steven Melendez, April 12, 2018.

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Elizabeth McLean for drawing my attention to this point, email communication June 4, 2019.

⁴⁶ Changes in performance timing may sometimes be the result of different stage conditions. For instance, the stage area for the Vaughan memorial performances was unusually narrow, and the floor more slippery than usual.