



SOCIETY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
Bringing the World's Best to Houston

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Direct from the UK, Richard Alston Dance Company to Make Houston Debut

Presented by Society for the Performing Arts

HOUSTON (Sept. 25, 2009) – Society for the Performing Arts (SPA), bringing the world's best to Houston, presents Great Britain's premier contemporary dance company, **Richard Alston Dance Company**, on Friday, Oct. 16, at 8 p.m. in Wortham Center's Cullen Theater.

Boasting 15 years of performing cutting edge choreography, Richard Alston Dance Company is making its Houston debut. Under the visionary direction of artistic director and company namesake Richard Alston, the dancers will perform *Blow Over*, which races along to the exhilarating pulse of Philip Glass's *Songs From Liquid Days*; *Movements From Petrushka*, Alston's skillful reworking of images from the ballet *Petrushka* to music by Stravinsky; and *To Dance and Skylark*, Martin Lawrance's high-spirited, athletic choreography reflecting the joy and vigor of Bach's much loved Brandenburg concertos.

Launched in 1994 to critical acclaim, the Richard Alston Dance Company is Britain's largest independent company. Over the past decade, Alston has created more than 20 pieces for his company. Described by *The Times* of London as "a choreographer for whom every dance is a love affair for his chosen music," Alston has ensured that music play a vital part in the company's identity. Since the company's inception, Alston has used the work of a diverse range of composers including Brahms, Hoagy Carmichael, Monteverdi, Shostakovich and Stravinsky, as well as the work of contemporary British composers.

Richard Alston choreographed his first work more than 40 years ago as a student at the London School of Contemporary Dance. Since that time, he has served as Resident Choreographer with Ballet Rambert, created works for Ballet Atlantique in France, and received an honorary Doctorate of Philosophy in dance from Surrey University and an honorary M.A. from University College Chichester.

Alston's primary influences were Merce Cunningham, and Mary Fulkerson, an American dancer, who introduced release technique and contact improvisation to Alston. Cunningham first performed in London in 1964, and Alston later had the opportunity to study with him in New York in 1975. Alston was inspired by Cunningham's philosophy of celebrating dance for dance's sake, challenging the idea that dance must be a means of telling a story or expressing extreme emotions.

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He was also inspired by Cunningham's collaborations with modern-era musicians and visual artists, and formed working relationships with many of his contemporaries. After studying with Cunningham and working as an independent choreographer and teacher for several years in London, Alston was appointed resident choreographer with Britain's Ballet Rambert in 1980, and later served as the artistic director from 1986-92. In 1992, Alston became the artistic director of The Place, London's largest dance center where his company is headquartered.

Prior to the performance, patrons are welcome to attend Arts Talk!, a pre-performance lecture with Richard Alston at 7 p.m. in the Cullen Theater. At 7:30 p.m. in the Wortham Center's Grand Foyer, patrons may enjoy the Performance Prelude by West Briar Middle School's FUSION and Lamar Dance Theater.

Part of SPA's IW Marks Dance Series, this performance is generously sponsored by Fretz Construction, Continental Airlines, H-E-B and The Brown Hand Center.

Tickets range from \$20-\$50 and can be purchased online at www.spahouston.org, by phone at 713-227-4SPA or at the courtyard level ticket office at Jones Hall located at 615 Louisiana St. Hours of operation: 9 a.m.–6 p.m. Monday – Friday, and 10 a.m.–4 p.m. on Saturday. For groups of 15 or more, call 713-632-8113.

Beyond the Stage

An IW Marks Dance Master Class, taught by a member of Richard Alston Dance Company, will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 15, at the Jewish Community Center, 5601 S. Braeswood. Classes are open to the public for a maximum of 35 dancers who are intermediate to advanced-level in skill. The cost to participate is \$3.50 for advance reservations and \$5 at the door. The cost is \$3.50 in advance and \$5 at the door. For more information or to register, call 713-729-3200 ext. 3223.

About Society for the Performing Arts

Founded in 1966, Society for the Performing Arts (SPA) is the largest independent non-profit presenting organization in the Southwest. Since its inception, SPA has sponsored more than 800 performances of the world's finest music, dance and theater events, in adherence to the belief that the arts are fundamental to the overall enrichment and quality of life within the community. In addition to presenting artists, SPA seeks to provide a variety of learning experiences for adults and children through master classes, lectures and special student performances, as well as build relationships between the performing arts and other interests within the greater Houston area and throughout the state of Texas.

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