

Pulcinella by richard alston essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Pulcinella was choreographed by Richard Alston in 1987. It was created for the sixteen dancers of Ballet Rambert, the year after he was appointed Artistic Director of the company. It premiered (shown for the first time) at the Leeds Grand Theatre on January 13th 1987.

The original version of Pulcinella was created in 1920 by Massine. It was created for the Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. Igor Stravinsky originally produced the music score, which was re-used by Alston in the 1987 version of Pulcinella. Massine's stimulus was having watched Pulcinella in a street fair in Naples (1917). Commedia dell'arte is a form of Italian comedy.

Its origins are in the medieval times. It was a very important part of Italian theatres between 1450 and 1650. The script was dependent upon the actor, and not the play writer. Most plays were completely improvised, all the actor had to work from was a 'skeleton plot' which kept the players within boundaries.

Commedia dell'arte consisted of visual comedy. No jokes were told. The comic actors wore masks, sometimes portraying oversized facial features, for example, an enlarged nose to show he/she is a nosy person. Dancer, singers, acrobats, comedians, and mime artists all took part in these commedia dell'arte productions. Actors always played the same role. So the lovers would always be lovers etc.

Young lovers were the main part of these commedia dell'arte performances. The plays always showed their efforts to meet and marry each other. The maid in these plays was usually called Rossetta or Colombina, and the father was called Pantalone. Other popular characters were called; Pulcinella,

Pedrolino, Scapino, Mezzetino, Brighella, and Arlecchino. Through time, the players names changes slightly.

Arlecchino became Harlequin, Colombina became Colombine, Pantalone became Pantaloon, in France Pulcinella became Polchinelles, and in England, became Punchinello, which then changed to Punch, (Punch and Judy). Alston has adapted the 1920 version of Pulcinella and made it his own version. The characters are from the original *comedia dell'arte*. Rosetta, Isabella and Prudenza are bored with their lovers, they are attracted to Pulcinella.

Pulcinella flirts with the ladies, much to the irritation of his wife Pimpinella, and the ladies lovers, Caviello, Cinzio, and Florindo. The men threaten Pulchinella, but Pimpinella, and their neighbour see the men off. That night the men catch Pulchinella as he sneaks off to meet the girls. They beat him up, and knowing that he cannot escape, Pulcinella 'dies'.

The men are appalled by what they think they have done, cover his body with a cape and walk away, before his body is discovered by the ladies. They are distraught, and perform very exaggerated mourning motifs. They are particularly distraught when the body vanishes. Pimpinella persuades her friends to dress as Pulchinellas, in order to teach the women a lesson.

The women are terrified, and think that they are seeing ghosts! When the fake Pulchinellas reveal themselves, all is cleared up. The three women ask for forgiveness, and they celebrate. The costumes are uniform throughout the dance. The men wear black V-neck shirts tucked into their breeches which come just below the knee.

These are worn with white tights and black shoes. The colour matches the colour of their lovers dresses. The women wear silk dresses, with fitted bodies with wide shoulder straps. Pulcinella and Pimpinella wear white throughout the dance. In the second scene of Pulcinella, the women wear black triangular shawls over their heads when mourning. Alston's Pulcinella is a narrative dance.

It's a contemporary ballet. The set design is by Howard Hodgkin. He used abstract art and blocks of colour for the set design. Pulcinella's set design consists of four scene cloths.

The first scene cloth shows blocks, suggestive of Mediterranean buildings. The second scene cloth is the night sky with a dramatic moon. The final scene cloth is based on colourful flags, suggestive of a carnival. The front cloth is the fourth cloth, this could be interpreted as a garden or park. It includes bold green brush strokes as well as patches of red, white, and blue. Hodgkin studied at the Camberwell School of Art in London.

His work is very angular, abstract, blurred, patchy, and consists of layered brush strokes. The lighting design is by Peter Mumford. Without lighting, we would not be able to perceive the changes from a sunny street in Naples to a secluded spot at night. The lighting is a very integral part of the production. The movements in Pulcinella are all rather exaggerated. Some movements are very comical.

For example, when Pulcinella is being attacked, and 'dies'. This is very funny to watch. He puts his hands around his throat as if it's his last breath. The

mourning movements are also comical, as they are very exaggerated. There seems to be some correlation between the movement and sound.

The mime elements in Pulcinella are very clear, and anyone watching would get the gist of the story line. We occasionally see traditional ballet mime, for example, the circling of the face with hand. Alston wants to make the gestures clear. The women have a stylish signature walk on demi-pointe.

The lover's movement is much more lyrical and has a lighter quality than the friends and neighbours, who have a more natural quality, e. g. flexed feet.

Pulchinella and Pimpinella's movements are more like the neighbours, rather than the lovers. I enjoyed some parts of Pulcinella, for example, the comical, exaggerated scenes, although, I did find some parts of the dance slightly boring.

I particularly enjoyed the scene, in which Pulchinella is being attacked and 'dies'. It was very amusing when Pulchinella vanished, and the ladies