

# British Theatre Guide

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## A Ceremony of Carols

Richard Alston Dance Company  
The Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury  
8–9 February 2012

Contemporary dance is a genre credited for its unconventionality. However this has led in some cases to the attitude of 'anything goes'. Contemporary therefore has progressed very diversely, split into the good, the bad and the ugly. I am pleased to say that Richard Alston is, as ever, keeping the bar high and flying the flag as a leading contemporary dance choreographer.

The evening is divided into three performances, the best being saved until last. The performances are all different in sense of mood, style and choreography. The company uses eleven dancers for this production, all very technically au fait but, for me, some of them at times lacked passion and empathy. A special mention for Nathan Goodman though, who danced with such strength, power and emotion throughout; making his performance alone truly memorable.

The opening piece, *Roughcut*, is a high energy and dynamic performance. The movements are created skilfully appearing 'thrown-away' but actually executed with fine precision to create a clever effect. The finest aspect of Alston's work is that his choreography cannot be identified step-to-step but is performed in a flowing, care-free way that leads the audience to believe it has been created for the first time before their eyes.

The second act *Unfinished Business* is danced to Mozart K533. In contrast to *Roughcut*, it's bald, robotic modern classical music by Reich, the Mozart is sublime and played magnificently by pianist Faith Leadbetter. The Allegro section is the highlight of the evening, joyous and uplifting to watch. The unusual shapes and unique motifs used throughout the performance make it captivating for the audience.

New to the stage, *A Ceremony of Carols*, is the concluding piece of the evening. Born in Canterbury this work was created to show that the city is 'more than just a cathedral'. Young Canterbury Cathedral Choristers sing Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* conducted by David Flood and accompanied by harpist, Camilla Pay, an astounding musical arrangement, in fact so good that at times it outshines the dancers. The fine details are well presented with a clever use of a very simple, yet symbolic prop. The company comes together to perform the final act with a wonderful sense of equality, and Richard Alston's desire to 'unite Cathedral and newly-sprung Marlowe Theatre more closely' is fulfilled.

Overall some stunning classic musical arrangements and some innovative choreography, perhaps not Alston at his absolute best, but still far superior to other leading contemporary choreographers.

Reviewer: [Joanna Burden](#)