



Review: Grupo Corpo Brazilian Dance Theatre

BY NATASHA GAUTHIER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN MARCH 21, 2009

What: Grupo Corpo Brazilian Dance Theatre

When: Friday, March 20 and Saturday, March 21

Where: NAC's Southam Hall

It's easy to fall into Carioca clichés when describing the antics of Grupo Corpo Brazilian Dance Theatre. Deservedly gushing international reviews of the 20-member company are usually peppered with words like "tropical," "samba," "Latin" and other terms that conjure up steamy images of Carnival nights in Rio.

What to make, then, of *Breu*, artistic director Rodrigo Pederneiras's latest work? The language it inspires comes from a decidedly darker place: gritty, industrial, raw, street.

The costumes are graphic black and white; the set features hulking walls of black mirrored tile. *Breu* is the furthest thing from sunny that you can imagine, but it isn't cold. Pederneiras' marvelously inventive choreography and the dancers' electric passion create a sexy, cool, modern heat that transcends cultural stereotypes.

Set to a funky original score by Brazilian composer Lenine, *Breu* makes extraordinary demands of the dancers, who respond with extraordinary commitment. They spend much of their time on the ground, falling over each other, propelling themselves across the floor with impressive power and speed entirely by hard, jerky flexions of their knees, hips and elbows. You wince each time someone's spine slams into the stage, which happens a lot, but the dancers seem impervious to pain or exhaustion. *Breu* bubbles with a kind of stylized urban violence, and the fascinating, nervy movement owes as much to breakers' spontaneous curbside challenges, with their thinly veiled aggression and machismo, as to any academic dance form.

The double bill evening opened with an earlier work, Pederneiras' *Seven or Eight Pieces for a Ballet* from 1994. It's much more typical of Grupo's style: quirky and amusing, virtuosic, cleverly repetitive, with nods to African and South American dance—the loose, bouncy knees, the swiveling hips. Wearing colourful striped leotards and helmets, the dancers alternate between rigid, automaton-like shuffling and exuberant displays. They almost always move in pairs, but rarely touch—except in one gorgeous sequence where the women fling themselves, as if pulled by a magnet, from a sitting position straight into the men's arms. Most of the time, though, they dance next to, rather than with, their partner; the subtle patterns they form call to mind matched chromosomes or sequences of genetic code. Music is by the group Uakti, who design and make their own instruments and hail from Grupo Corpo's home base of Belo Horizonte.

Friday night's performance marked Grupo Corpo's sixth visit to the NAC, and the ensemble's enduring popularity with Ottawa dance lovers ensured a nearly sold-out house.

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