

CRITICS



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

Ana Paula Cancado and Peter Lavratti, Grupo Corpo dancers, in "Lecuona," with music by Ernesto Lecuona, the "Cuban Gershwin."

DANCE REVIEW

Fast and Sometimes Tricky Moves, Straight Out of Brazil

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Grupo Corpo, which probably counts as Brazil's best-known dance company, starts with one inestimable advantage: its name. "Corpo" has multiple meanings in Portuguese (body of work, corps, corporation). But the raw image of a group of bodies communicates in any language. It's punchy and exciting.

As is this company, which opened a four-performance run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Tuesday night. Brazil likes to think of itself, not without reason, as the world center for exotic eroticism, and Grupo Corpo sells that image, hard.

The company is based in the city of Belo Horizonte and was founded 30 years ago by Paulo Pederneiras, who remains artistic director. Its chor-

Grupo Corpo continues through Saturday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Opera House, 30 Lafayette Avenue, at Ashland Place, Fort Greene; (718) 636-4100 or bam.org.

Grupo Corpo

Brooklyn Academy of Music

eographer since 1978 has been his younger brother Rodrigo.

The choreography is distinctive. It is so high-energy that the occasional adagio moments come as a shock and a relief. It is basically modern dance, whatever that means today: barefoot or with ordinary shoes (flat, high-heeled), with lots of allusions to popular dance (Brazilian street dance, ballroom dance, African dance) and even to ballet. There is elegance here, but also deliberate dislocation: hips thrust out, women leaping suddenly into the arms of their partners and into tricky, sometimes scary-looking lifts.

All this calls such attention to itself that sometimes the company's loftier intentions get lost. This week's program offers two works, "Lecuona" and "Onqotô." "Lecuona" is conceptually simpler. It is set to recorded love songs by Ernesto Lecuona (1895-1963), the "Cuban Gersh-

win," and 13 of them over 40 minutes seemed, to this taste, a few too many.

The first 12 dances are duets, full of Mr. Pederneiras's characteristically complex, sexy, funny, sometimes violent movement. This is social dancing, but raised to a level of twisting, knotty virtuosity. The wom-

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en stand out, partly because they get flashy backless ball gowns, a different color for each song, with the men remaining soberly in black. All the dancers are good, but Janaina Castro, in the gray dress with the frilly hem in the seventh song, showed how the choreography could move from the spectacularly effortful into sensuous ease. There is a group waltz at

the end, with reflecting walls and all the dresses white.

"Onqotô" refers to the first of a slangy series of existential questions in the dialect of Minas Gerais, the state of which Belo Horizonte is the capital. This is based on a recorded score by Caetano Veloso and José Miguel Wisnik that raises all sorts of issues about man and the universe, but does so in a lively collage of songs and percussion and ambient noise.

Just how we are to perceive all this intellection in the dance itself is unclear. What we get is more brilliant physical display: 19 dancers in black, slapping their soles percussively on the floor and forming ingenious patterns, passing back and forth through a black curtain of hanging ribbons. And more duets — lots of floor work here — including a tender one for two men and a steamy one for two women.

Grupo Corpo is fun, even if its larger pretensions don't always translate. But fun is a not insignificant virtue in dance, and the audience responded with enthusiasm.