

The throws of passion

Dance

Grupo Corpo

Sadler's Wells

★★★★☆

DONALD HUTERA

STILL going strong after three decades, Grupo Corpo from Brazil is one of four international companies touring the UK in 2005 under the auspices of the Dance Consortium. In May and June this organisation of 19 large-scale British venues hosts the French-Algerian hip-hop troupe Compagnie Kafig, followed by the youthful Nederlands Dans Theater 2. The season ends in the autumn with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

But first comes Corpo (Portuguese for "body") on its first British visit in five years. The 20 well-trained bodies in its highly contrasting double bill are fabulously fit and put on sometimes flagrant display.

Premiered in 2000, *O Corpo* has become a company signature piece. This abstract curtain-raiser is a work of hard-edged seduction. The dead-sexy dancers sport an urban uniform of unitard with puffed shorts, ruched leg warmers or fringe, all in black. The lighting is variations on red. Glowing dots flash on the back wall, or overheads rock and reel as if in some infernal, unstable disco.

The Brazilian pop-poet Arnaldo Antunes's dark, eclectic soundtrack features explosive instrumentation, intoxicating percussion and plaintive female vocals layered against the composer's own deep-voiced utterances.

The choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras, meanwhile, indulges in a plethora of pinpoint calisthenic rhythms: frog jumps, scissoring leaps, lunging hops, ball-like rollings on the spine. The springy, slinky dancers slide on and tumble off after executing lurching, stiff-legged walks and fast, floor-licking steps. The full-

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bodied, robotic clubbiness of Pederneiras's writing can bug up your perceptions. Some of the physical mechanics are mesmerising, and yet at bottom *O Corpo* left me feeling oddly detached.

Lecuona (pictured) is another matter altogether. This string of blatantly copulatory yet hyper-stylised duets is named after a prolific 20th-century composer once dubbed "the Cuban Gershwin". Set to a full-throated clutch of songs, each coupling occurs in a box of colour-saturated light. The almost masochistically supple women wear bright,

ruffled costumes of flowing chiffon that bare their luscious limbs. The black-clad men are mostly their vice-like, thrust-worthy manipulators.

Lecuona lends new meaning to the word "ballroom". It certainly goes way beyond *Strictly Come Dancing*. My feelings about it changed as I watched and registered the audience's response. The piece fascinates me as a Latin male choreographer's fantasy vision of the way women might want to be treated. Is this more than sexual politics reduced to pseudo-balletic amatory stunts? Pederneiras converts the

music's heightened emotions into a vivid, concentrated dream of lust and desire that bears comparison, say, with Kenneth MacMillan's most heated pas de deux. His blunt yet sophisticated dance is peppered with comic invention, but the cast wisely never plays it for laughs. It all ends with a splurge of kitsch romanticism. ● Box office (0870 7377737) to Sat; then Brighton Dome, April 18-19; Sheffield Lyceum, April 22-23; Nottingham Playhouse, April 26; Birmingham Hippodrome, April 29-30; Wycombe Swan, May 3