

BOSTON GLOBE

DANCE REVIEW

Brazil's Grupo Corpo dazzles

By Karen Campbell, Globe Correspondent, 7/12/2002

LEE - For more than a quarter-century, brothers Paulo and Rodrigo Pederneiras have been forging an artistic aesthetic for their Brazilian dance company that is as rich and multifaceted as Brazilian culture itself. Grupo Corpo's vibrant fusion of ballet, jazz, and modern dance is heavily infused with the sultry sensuousness and high-energy insouciance of a myriad of popular Afro-Brazilian dance styles. This distinctive vocabulary, performed by vivacious, superbly trained dancers, has helped make the company Brazil's most successful.

After wildly acclaimed visits in 1999 and 2000, Grupo Corpo returned to Jacob's Pillow Wednesday night, bringing a brand new piece in its world premiere. Choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras's 40-minute "Santagustin" was a dazzling technical display of all the company does so well - sky-high extensions, blistering turns, lightning footwork, combined with stunningly fluid hips, heads, and torsos.

They made it all seem so easy, so completely fun, that this no-doubt exhausting explosion of nonstop movement came across as a playful romp. Yet the rigor was unmistakable. Sharp-lined phrases were grounded and immaculately controlled, yet enlivened by vividly articulated gestures and quicksilver shifts in dynamics.

The eclectic score by Tom Ze and Gilberto Assis set the irreverent tone of "Santagustin." Colorfully dissonant with an undercurrent of rock groove, the music ranged from chirping cellphones and quacking duck calls to a melange of Brazilian folk and popular vocal stylings. In response, the 19 dancers came together and burst apart in a whirling kaleidoscope of flamboyant patterns and playful couplings. Feisty chest and hip bumps sent some dancers careening, while well-placed kicks catapulted others into backward leaps or sideways, mid-air thrashings.

As dancers paired up, heads tossed, and pelvises grinded before the performers sprung into the jazzy footwork of ecstatic liberation. Two men locked in each other's embrace rolled and spun, crawling like bugs or vaulting through spiraled lifts. Ultimately, it's a little messy (the company still considers this a work in progress), but despite the occasional first-night glitches, this exuberant performance was viscerally thrilling.

The clue to Pederneiras's "Seven or Eight Pieces for a Ballet" is in the title, which implies an ambiguously fluid series of studies. However, set to the music of Philip Glass and found-instrument ensemble UAKTI, there is nothing unclear in the work's arresting patterns of discreetly constructed unison phrases. In minimalist fashion, they are layered and sequenced with meticulous care. Sometimes they elucidate the music's inner rhythms, giving visual life to the aural underpinning.

At other times, the movement provides counterpoint, creating its own rhythmic layers to add to the overall texture. What keeps it all vividly clear is the repetitive minimalist aesthetic, which gives the eye time to settle before change occurs. Like the music, the choreography doesn't so much develop as unspool in long ribbons of propulsive movement. Yet the dancers never merely mimic the music. There's always a little something extra going on beneath the sensual swing of the hips, the hyperarched segmented roll of the torso, and that jazzy step-slide that calls in the samba at every turn.

Grupo Corpo

At: Jacob's Pillow, Lee. Wednesday; runs through Sunday