

This Weekend

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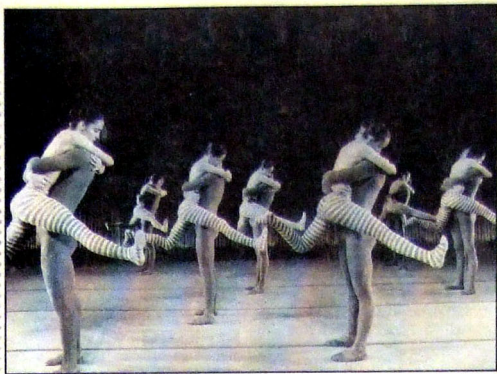


Photo by José Luiz Pederneras

Grupo Corpo in the 1994 '7 or 8 Pieces for a Ballet,' the featured work in the company's program this week in the Ted Shawn Theater at Jacob's Pillow.

Bump, jerk, roll, fling: Grupo Corpo is back

By Leslie Kandell

Special to The Eagle

BECKET — Bump, jerk, roll, fling: Grupo Corpo is back at Jacob's Pillow. The exciting Brazilian company of 20, which wowed Pillow audiences in 1999 and 2000, has brought two dances with a new and a brand-new take on its exhilarating meltdown of mobile pelvis, Mardi Gras and physical fitness class.

The 1994 "7 or 8 Pieces for a Ballet," and also "Santagustin," which had its premiere Wednesday in the Ted Shawn Theater, are full-length works of about 45 minutes, but time, as it does at a rousing party, did not stand still: It flew.

Both dances were choreographed by the troupe's director Rodrigo Pederneras, lighted by his brother Paulo and costumed by Freusa Zechmeister. The composers are different. "Seven or Eight Pieces" has a perfectly tailored score by Philip Glass, who had been working with the musical group UAKTI, which experiments with plastic plumbing pipes to create a soft steel-band sound.

Audience members will probably find the title's term "Ballet" a red herring, or at best a reference to the company's classical training.

Hobbling sideways on stiff spread legs like a pyramid-art assembly line gone berserk, dancers begin "7 or 8" wearing black tops, striped tights and black mini-caps. Choreography and costumes are unisex — unitards change but caps stay — and the upfront originality and energy are instantly captivating.

The pieces are for large and small ensembles that leap and spin on little cat feet, in front of a vertically striped green and black backdrop that changes colors as colored unitards are added.

Dancers show up in nude-tone unitards, and as the piece proceeds, more and more are in solid colors, which are reflected by background color changes.

"7 or 8" calls for self-contained revelers who avoid relationships other than parallel action, and make no eye contact. The few soloists kick with knees, hips and feet, but don't show off. The closest moments to partner acknowledgment are when men in green drag their partners onto the stage and one at a time, over and over, those partners jump up from the floor into their arms and are carried off. Cavorting jumps become

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falls followed by re-tries. We're glued to these loose arms and rubber pelvises.

One dance has them wiggling their necks like double-jointed chickens, first one pair doing it, then more. It looks as if it would feel wonderful.

Philip Glass is his distinctive self in everything he writes. Yet the rhythms and metallic timbres of his score adapt perfectly to the slippery as well as the strictly controlled movements, and even to the South American flavors. His famous signature repetitive patterns fit the dances' repetitions — a brilliant concept.

The dancers in the company think of "Santagustin," which is to go next to Brazil, as a work still in progress though, as Pillow director Ella Baff said, "I do not."

The work begins with what sounds like a concerto for cell phones. (The polyglot score, which includes fado, is by Tom Ze and Gilberto Assis.)

Dancers in colored tank suits pair off and frolic with irreverent jauntiness in what suggests a stylized beach party fantasy. The movement vocabulary is akin to that of "7 or 8," but it looks different with all that individualized clothing and visible flesh.

Mixed and same-sex couples fight, play and love, jumping around on each other if size permits.

Grupo Corpo doesn't seem to like names singled out, but a strong male pair danced locked together, just as the groups in the first piece were locked into parallel. And finally came the samba, one of the multiple Brazilian rhythms that Villa Lobos notated in his "Choros" pieces.

Those of great enough age may recall the conductor Eleazar de Carvalho at Tanglewood, thumping himself in several rhythms at once and grinning because it was so easy for him. Grupo Corpo displays that rhythmic force and variety belonging to the diverse cultures of Brazil.

Grupo Corpo performs in the Ted Shawn Theater tonight at 8, tomorrow at 2 (a family matinee) and 8, and Sunday at 2. The performances are sold out but those interested in attending are advised to call the Jacob's Pillow box office at 243-0745 and ask to be placed on the waiting list.