

Hot-blooded Brazilians a panacea for winter-weary

*By Deirdre Kelly
The Globe and Mail
Toronto, March 29, 2001*

Perhaps it was a blustery Tuesday night in a winter that refuses to die that kept the turnout small when Brazil's generously sensual Grupo Corpo paid a return visit to Toronto this week.

The holler and fuss by the audience at Premiere Dance Theatre that followed the nearly two-hour performance was testament to its heat-warming performance. The hot red, orange and yellow colours of the dancers skin-baring costumes were a panacea to snow-weary eyes.

Led by choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras, a Brazilian Bob Fosse, the 19-membertroupe is zesty, high-sprung, vibrant and abundantly energetic. And so was the choreography an antidote to the drabness and frigidity of much contemporary dance these days.

The performers - all endowed with incandescent personalities and can't-keep-your-eyes-off-them bodies - symbolize the instinctive impulse to dance.

There's obviously much skill involved here. The precision of the choreography, not to mention its supersonic pace, can only be mastered by dancers who are at the top of their craft.

This is movement that attacks and seduces as it leaps from one infectiously kinetic experience to another. You watch and you are conquered, pierced by arrows of desire and love.

What's a poor puritan to do, but give in completely. And it's a good thing too, as it allows you to forgive the fact that the choreography - showcased in two pieces from the previous decade - 1997's *Parabelo* and 1998's *Benguêlo* - grows monotonous even as it burns up the stage with its powerful drive.

Pederneiras, who founded Grupo Corpo (Group Body) in 1975, has a winning style that he refuses to give up. It's gymnastics meets samba - abundantly physical, sexy and joyfully free of inhibitions. Heads bob, wrists curl, shoulders shake, arms shoot out at the sides or dangle, monkey-like to the ground.

As eclectic as the melting-pot population of Brazil, there are fragments of European ballet and cool, slinky American jazz interspersed with social dance, African improvisation and the deadly high kicks of the Brazilian martial art capoeira.

Often the dancers look like the Lycra-bound babes of Broadway, hip-wagging through a syncopated group dance of erotomania. The boys and girls of Brazil win the day by dancing a chorus line right through your heart.

Still, it is flamboyant. And on a cold night on the shore of Lake Ontario, such resplendent extravagance is heartwarming, indeed.