

Miscellany

Reviews

Dance

Better at happiness

Grupo Corpo

Sadler's Wells, London

★★★

Brazil's Grupo Corpo dance the way Brazil's footballers play football: loose and litho. The joy comes from simply playing the game and strutting your stuff without worrying about the result. That takes care of itself.

In just the way a footballer's dribble starts with a subtle shimmy, so the key to the way Grupo Corpo move lies in the hips. It's from this underrated midfield section that all the playmaking of choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras begins, liquid ripples eddying through the bodies of his 18 willowy dancers. As a style, it's deceptively effortless.

It's rare to find a contemporary dance company that's so close to its cultural roots. Pederneiras draws heavily from Brazilian influences to construct rambling travelogues that explore the limbo land between folk dance and modern moves while staying (for the most part) just this side of showbiz. When it works, it's an intoxicating blend.

Much the more successful of the company's double bill is the opening *Parabelo*. Driven by the insistent rhythms of a hypnotic score by composer Tom Ze and poet Jose Miguel Wisnik, *Parabelo* paints a portrait of a wild, untamed land a world away from the familiar images of beach soccer and Rio carnival. Yet, for all

the sharp limb-stabbing, a sense of irrepressible spirit shines through.

Whether tackling a wedding dance with intricately flowing hand patterns or a gymnastically demanding moodily lit duet, Grupo Corpo's dancers prove masters of their art, providing a common thread between the seemingly disparate elements of the dance. It's saying something, but on the finely tuned bodies of Grupo Corpo (it means, simply enough, Body Group), *Iyera*, that modern dance stand-by, almost looks cool.

The formula doesn't work nearly as well in *Benguete*, a rather darker look at the melting pot of Brazilian culture. While Pederneiras steers impressively clear of cliché when it comes to being upbeat, his vision of moody (and, as *Benguete* harks back to Brazil's African connections in the slave era, he needs to be very moody) seemed back and second-hand, little more than a parade of oppressed shoulder shrugs.

The magic did surface sporadically, particularly in a succession of celebratory female solos that matched anything in *Parabelo*. These tapped in again to Grupo Corpo's central appeal: neither self-consciously modern, nor painfully, authentically retro, Grupo Corpo mine their own culture with a looseness of spirit that matches their free-wheeling limbs. You can hardly blame them for being better at being happy.

Keith Watson

★★★★ Unmissable
★★★★ Recommended
★★★ Enjoyable
★★ Mediocre ★ Terrible