

Stunning Locomotion  
Movement redefined with Brazilian élan

By Sylviane Gold

Sylviane Gold is a regular contributor to Newsday.

So you want to take a little walk. You could put one foot in front of the other, until you get where you want to be. Or you could try it the Grupo Corpo way, tossing back your head and kicking back a leg before propelling it forward; or taking a giant goose step and dropping to a knee, then repeating the process with the other leg; or you could just undulate all your major muscle groups, letting them nudge you forward, inch by inch.

The members of the Brazilian dance company Grupo Corpo, which made its Next Wave Festival debut on Tuesday night, employed all these techniques – and more – to get from one end of the Brooklyn Academy of Music stage to the other. They rolled, they tumbled, they skipped in slow-mo. As locomotion, it was not terribly efficient; as dance, it was utterly compelling.

Grupo Corpo is something of a homegrown, family affair. The artistic director, Paulo Pederneiras, began it in 1975 and ran it at first from his house in Belo Horizonte, which is more of a provincial mining capital than a culture hub. His brother Rodrigo does all the choreography. And three other siblings are involved in the company in one way or another.

Despite its rather unprepossessing origins, Grupo Corpo has evolved into a dance powerhouse, with stunning dancers, clever choreography and gorgeous theatrical effects. These often are created by Paulo, who designed the lighting for the BAM program's first piece, "21," and did the set and lighting for the second half, "O Corpo."

In "21," set to an eclectic modern score by Marco Antonio Guimaraes, the lights come up on 14 dancers in dull yellow bodysuits swaying slowly together, first to one side, then the other. By the time the curtain comes down, the uniformity has given way to a riot of color and movement – Freusa Zechmeister's costumes bloom with bright stripes and flowers; Fernando Velloso's patchwork set jumps with pattern and pigment, and Rodrigo's strictly regimented choreography has broken into a wild party.

"O Corpo" employs many of the same choreographic means as "21," but to entirely different ends. Arnaldo Antunes' score is heavily electronic, and Paulo has provided a blood-red environment for the dancers, in tiered, fringed, pouffed black costumes by Zechmeister and Velloso. The highlight of the piece is a very Grupo Corpo combination of light, movement and design: A rectangle of white pierces the crimson backdrop and slides across the stage while three women, silhouettes blurred by full-body fringe, ooze slowly back and forth in front of it.

Who were they? The program doesn't list names. But why should it? This is a company of standouts.

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DANCE REVIEW

GRUPO CORPO. Artistic director Paulo Pederneiras; choreographer, Rodrigo Pederneiras. Presented by Next Wave Festival. Program: "21" (1992), music by Marco Antonio Guimaraes, and "O Corpo" (2000), music by Arnaldo Antunes. Seen Tuesday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. Through tomorrow night.