

# GRUPO CORPO

## GIRA

[Premiere 2017]

choreography: **Rodrigo Pederneiras**

music: **Metá Metá**

set design: **Paulo Pederneiras**

costume design: **Freusa Zechmeister**

lighting design: **Paulo Pederneiras** and **Gabriel Pederneiras**

[duration: 40 minutes]

- **Gira**

*Noun, Brazilian Portuguese* [From quimbundo *njila*, “spin”; from quicongonzila, “path”]

In Angola-Congo nations (types of Candomblé) and Umbanda gatherings, a congregation gets together to worship the deities (“spiritual beings”) of the *terreiro* (a site of worship in Candomblé) with chants and ritual dances (usually performed by spinning in circles).

Synonymous with *jira*, *enjira*, *canjira*, corruptions of *Njila*, *Pambunzila*, *Bombojira*, which are some of the names related to Eshu in Angola-Congo nations.

The rituals of Umbanda – the most worshiped of religions born in Brazil, and the result of the merger of Candomblé with Catholicism and Kardecism, and intangible heritage of Rio Janeiro since 2016 – are the great source of inspiration for the set aesthetics of the spectacle *Gira*, with choreography by Rodrigo Pederneiras, scenography by Paulo Pederneiras, lights by Paulo and Gabriel Pederneiras, and costumes by Freusa Zechmeister. Metá Metá, a band from São Paulo, wrote the original soundtrack for the show.

But it is Eshu who guides and stages the show as its driving force. In African cosmology, Eshu represents the dynamic principle, without which all would be static; it is the messenger between the spiritual world and the material world; a god of infinite expansion and multiplication, lord of all paths and crossroads, the master of all order and confusion.

Metá Metá (“three at the same time”, in Yoruba), formed by Juçara Marçal (voice), Thiago França (sax), and Kiko Dinucci (guitar) – alongside Sergio Machado (drums, sampler, and percussion) and Marcelo Cabral (electric and acoustic bass) – wrote eleven pieces specifically for the dance performance. Eshu, the most human of the orishas – without whom, in the

African-matrix religions, the cult just does not work – is the poetic reason that inspires and guides the eleven pieces created by Metá Metá for *Gira*. The soundtrack features two special guests: poet, essayist, and artist Nuno Ramos, and vocalist Elza Soares.

In order to follow the theme suggested by Metá Metá, the creators of Grupo Corpo first dived into the universe of Afro-Brazilian religions through literature and then through a field study, visiting Candomblé and Umbanda *terreiros* (sites of worship in Candomblé). Umbanda stood out in this process because it is the most syncretic and Brazilian of religions. In the end, *Gira* shaped itself as a poetic view of man's primordial need to connect with the divine or simply with the occult.

The set design uses a black linoleum "square" (13m X 9m), brightly lit, demarcating the stage area where the *gira* will take place, in a symbolic representation of a *terreiro*<sup>1</sup>, the great icon of Afro-Brazilian liturgy. On both sides and at the bottom of the stage, where the quick change rooms are usually located, traditionally invisible to the audience, 21 chairs are placed in an area immersed in the shadows, forming a semi-arena. On each chair, a faint light indicates an incorporeal presence. The non-scenario was designed as an installation by Paulo Pederneiras, which covers the bodies of the dancers with the same black tulle whenever they are off the set, transforming them into spirits. And the three walls of the black box create the illusion of an almost ghostly eternity.

Right at the beginning of the spectacle, a group of seven dancers occupies the center of the stage. They have their hands crossed on the left side of their hips, eyes closed, their upper bodies dangling over themselves as they form loose circles; everything about them suggests they are in a trance. This introduces the volatile character of the rest of the show.

If you think that you are going to watch a mimetic representation of Afro-Brazilian cults, you'd better think twice. Inspired by his experience in celebration rituals of both Candomblé and Umbanda (particularly the Eshu's *giras*), Rodrigo Pederneiras (re)produces the powerful variety of gestures and movements that he had access to, masterfully merging it with his extensive vocabulary developed over thirty years as the choreographer for GRUPO CORPO.

Group formations (usually with seven dancers) are recurrent, intercalated by brief trios, duos or solos. Performed to the sound of an eminently rhythmic track, two great melodic moments give way to the materialization of imperious female solos, danced to the voice of instruments that are equally lonely – the acoustic bass of Marcelo Cabral, in *AgôLonan*, and the tenor sax of Thiago França, in *OkutaYangi I*.

For the dancers, Freusa Zechmeister adopts the same language for the costumes of the entire cast, regardless of gender: naked torsos, with the other half of the body covered with primitive-cut white skirts and raw fabric.

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<sup>1</sup> A site of worship in Candomblé and Umbanda