

GRUPO CORPO

Benguelê

(Premiere 1998)

choreography: **Rodrigo Pederneiras**

music: **João Bosco**

set design: **Fernando Velloso** and **Paulo Pederneiras**

costume design: **Freusa Zechmeister**

lighting: **Paulo Pederneiras**

(duration: 41 minutes)

Banzo of Benguela, benguelê. Homesickness for the free and fertile lands of distant African kingdoms. This is one of the possible etymological origins of the word: Benguelê, understood here as the fusion Benguela, denoting a region in the Southwest of Angola, with the phoneme *lê* – in Kimbundo: nostalgia, disheartening reminiscence, homesickness.

Coincidence or not, it was while mulling over the bewitching of the most primitive and darkest music of **João Bosco** that Rodrigo and Paulo Pederneiras wrote and re-wrote their invitation to that great composer to write a score for **GRUPO CORPO**. Forever buried in commitments, only in November of 1997 was the author of *Gagabirô* finally able to deliver the anxiously awaited "yes." The result of the union of these two entities was that, in a manner of speaking, contemporary Mineiro art was revealed to the world on October 29th of the following year in the Alfa Real Theatre in São Paulo.

With a duration of little more than forty minutes, *Benguelê*, the ballet, like all the eleven pieces composed (or recomposed) especially for **Corpo**, has one foot in Africa, yes, but his array of influences/references reaches out to other more or less remote locales.

RED LIZARD, QUELÉ AND PIZINDIM

Somewhat Arabic, somewhat Mineiro, also a bit Carioca (by virtue of so many years living in Rio de Janeiro) and indisputably, a citizen of the world, João Bosco weaves with thread of multiple textures and origins his musical tapestry. The first to announce a presence in Bosco's music is the Black of Minas Gerais, who arrives on two lizard-backs in muted red tones. It's as if the speech as Mineiro as author Guimarães found an analog in music.

The ancestral and sovereign song of Clementina de Jesus -- star-guide of João Bosco to the mysteries of the roots of black music, produced by the descendants of slaves in Rio de Janeiro -- is

evoked in Tarantá, Carreiro Bebe, and mostly in the piece that gives its title to the performance. *Benguelê*, the old *corima* drum displayed by Clementina de Jesus in the anthological *Rosa de Ouro* in 1965, in which, as it came to be known years later, revealed a partnership between Pixinguinha and João of Bahia, reappeared in an arrangement *acappela*, and led, with the uncontested blessing of Queen Quelé, by a suddenly snow-white-haired and blacker João.

Pixinguinha, another cornerstone of black music of Rio, is also revered. And not only for his *Benguelê* presence: one Urubu from there of *Malandro* (and amazingly fast) is mixed up in Tarantá, becoming the folk dances of fiestas of Minas, while the classic *1 X 0* serves as inspiration for the triumphant-ballad of João: *Pixinguinha 10 X 0*.

Like the re-examination of the secular, Cuban *Song of Wemba* and *Gagabirô*, we turn half-around and leave behind the vast territory of the black corridor: Rio de Janeiro-Minas Gerais.

SEA, DESERT, CROSSING

The half-turn leads into the heart of the path that, after an impressionistic Debussian intro, launches into a long and dangerous *Travessia*. From the primordial intention of involving of the melodic universe of the great composers who write for classical ballet, João Bosco composes the three movements of a seafaring musical saga sailing with a weeping emanating from, perhaps, a ghost or slaving ship. It goes forth in procession through solid and firm ground, and spreads its weariness into an immense landscape of arid, Arabic, ardent water.

If we take into consideration that this segment (Indigenous peoples, Moors, Europeans – not necessarily in that order) take up sixteen out of the 41 minutes of our soundtrack, we begin to understand that it is too multi-faceted to be left with only one reading.

Plotted out in January of 1998 in the studio Impressão Digital, in Rio, the band assembled by João Bosco (acoustic guitar and voice) relied on the talented hands of **Jacques Morelenbaum** (cello), **Oswaldinho do Acordeom** (accordion) **Proveta** (sax and clarinet), **Ricardo Silveira** (12-string viola, steel-string guitar), **Nico Assunção** (acoustic bass), **Robertinho Silva** and **Armando Marçal** (percussion), beside the tenor **Sandro Assunção** (one of the voices of *Travessia*).

FROM CHAOS, HARMONY

The gradual process of deconstruction of the form and reconstruction of their own language extracted from the elements of Brazilian popular dances that, since the beginning of the decade, came to define the choreographic composition of **Rodrigo Pederneiras**, seems to have arrived in *Benguelê* at a place where the traces of the French School simply disappear to the audience. Among the motions of the foot, pelvis, and shoulder, the many hands on hips and swaying at the waist, one loses track of the spaces that reveal the presence of classical technique, without which the twenty dancers of the Mineiro company would be unable to execute their intricate body movements created by Rodrigo to the music of João Bosco.

The use of space is most of the time in anarchy, frenetic, while the tonality of the motion goes from festive to processional to ritualistic, with the shapes recalling human forms stooped over time and animalistic images.

Two meters off the ground, a horizontal line runs from point to point at the back of the stage, marking the area that later will be used as another dimensional plane of the stage. Below the line, a thick blackness. Above, a thin vertical marking in shades of dark gray and ash.

The absence of color in the staging mounted by **Fernando Velloso** and **Paulo Pederneiras** for the first three-quarters of the performance are contrasted with the profusion of colors in the

costuming of **Freusa Zechmeister**, who adopts white as the foundation and overlays it with various materials.

Suggested by the music of Bosco, the combination of diverse references within one language capable of bringing cohesion to the chaos seems to be the philosophy that reigns over **Benguelê**. It is as if the contexts of African rhythm, ring-around-the-rosy, square-dancing, of processions and the rites of devout could be arranged into one new image.

In the last quarter of the performance, this synchronicity explodes into a form of one of the most popular Afro-Brazilian festival, the Congado, which, with riotous joy and colorful ribbons, celebrates the coronation of the King of the Congo.

And leaving nostalgia for Africa behind, we come to the end of **Benguelê**.