

# GRUPO CORPO

## LECUONA

(Premiere 2004)

choreography: **Rodrigo Pederneiras**  
music: **Ernesto Lecuona**  
set design and lighting: **Paulo Pederneiras**  
costume design: **Freusa Zechmeister**

(duration: 40 minutes)

First, there are the strings, a whole lot of them. Then, the melodious piano. There are the tunes that verge on the kitsch, but end up being breath-takingly beautiful. The hyperbolic voices never miss a chance to go for vibratos or to hit shrill high notes – they are privileged and legitimate representatives of a by-gone era, of popular songs sung by classically trained voices. And then there are the words, passionate and impetuous, speaking of torrid love, voluptuous magnificence, ill-fated jealousy, broken hearts, brutal longings, contempt, rancor, and indifference...

Having received Petrobras endowment (the most prestigious grant of the country) for 4 years, and 12 years after staging the last choreography not set to an original soundtrack, **GRUPO CORPO** decides to challenge its own rules to render homage to the greatest icon of Cuban music of all times, dancing to twelve songs and one waltz from pianist and composer **Ernesto Lecuona** (1895-1963) in twelve duets and only a single group formation.

Each of the duets that dance Lecuona's twelve love songs is given one particular color. The light design created by Paulo Pederneiras constitutes the scenic space by projecting 8x7.5-metre cubes made of monochromatic light in hot hues. These cubes move in the black box following the moves of the each couple. The male dancers play domineering roles and get on stage wearing patent leather shoes, shirts, T-shirts or tank tops, and waistband trousers in various hues of black. In diaphanous dresses with an assortment of slits and cleavages, the fiery ladies of *LECUONA* put on 4,5 to 9 cm high heels and don one single color from head to toes. Those colors relate to the hue chosen by Paulo Pederneiras to light on each duet: shocking pink, turquoise blue, orange, yellow, bright green, royal blue, and so on.

After the 38-minute sequence of duets, the final waltz lasts little more than 2 minutes. The scenic space is expanded and, little by little, wing curtains start to fold, and they help form a gigantic cube made of mirrors (13-meter wide, 8-meter deep and 6-meter high).

The triple mirrors and cross-light make silhouettes out of the real couples, and there is an illusion of their projected images being lighted from the front. This way, with just 6 couples on stage – the women wearing white diaphanous long dresses, the men dressed in black trousers and shirts – the final dance is turned into a luminous shadow of a great ball of a by-gone era by Paulo Pederneiras.

### Ernesto Lecuona, the ‘Cuban Gershwin’



Ernesto Lecuona was born in Guanabacoa, near Havana, on August 7, 1895. He took the first piano lessons from his sister and was soon considered a boy wonder. At the age of five, he performed live for the first time. At eleven he published his first sheet music and started playing the piano for silent movies. Between twelve and thirteen we would write his first musical comedies performed in Cuba’s Teatro Martí, with librettos written by his brother, Fernando. At the age of seventeen he graduated from Havana’s *Conservatorio Nacional de Música*, ranking in first place and getting a gold medal. In 1920, he started an international career, performing his own pieces for the piano solo in the prestigious Aeolian Hall, in New York. In the early 20s, Lecuona would continue to pursue his studies in music with Maurice Ravel. He became one of the most important concert pianists of the world, touring Europe, the United States, and Latin America countless times. His concert music includes 176 pieces for the piano and 37 for orchestra, and it is considered an important contribution to 20th Century music. His ability to move back and forth from classical to popular music and his great melodic inspiration earned him the name “the Cuban Gershwin.” Lecuona wrote more than 400 songs, recorded by countless artists, among them Elvis Presley, Bing Crosby, and Frank Sinatra. He was also the composer of 11 movie soundtracks for Hollywood, and in 1942, he was nominated for the Oscar for best title-song with *Always in My Heart (Siempre en mi Corazón)*. His work as a soundtrack composer also includes music for films produced in Cuba, Argentina, and Mexico. Caetano Veloso in his CD *Fina Estampa* has recently recorded the title song of the Mexican

movie, *María La*. Lecuona was also involved with the dramatic arts, with a vast array of zarzuelas, light operas, variety shows and ballets. The most ambitious of Lecuona’s projects for theater, *El Sombrero de Yarey*, remains unstaged, though. It is his only opera, on which he worked for several years till his death, and it has never been brought together in its entirety. In spite of his busy international career, Ernesto Lecuona remained in Havana until 1960, when the Cuban Revolution made him leave the country and move to Spain. Already in a debilitated state, Lecuona decided to get to know his father’s homeland, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, and there he died on November 29, 1963.