

GRUPO CORPO

Missa do Orfanato

The Orphanage Mass

(Premiere 1989)

Choreography: **Rodrigo Pederneiras**

Music: **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

set design **Fernando Velloso**

costume design: **Freusa Zechmeister**

lighting: **Paulo Pederneiras**

(duration: 45 minutes)

When the opening chords of Mozart's Mass K.139 echo bombastically, a mass of light takes on the stage. As if it had been filtered through the stained glass of a cathedral, the light decomposes in beams and smoke creates the sense of a three dimensional volume, a monumental tower of mist and light. A symbol of God's power, the image forged out of light by Paulo Pederneiras for the opening scene of Corpo's *Missa do Orfanato* epitomizes the role of lighting in this show: to be the scenic realization of the intense religiosity emanating from Mozart's score and serve as a counterpoint to the stark worldliness of Rodrigo Pederneiras' choreography.

The ballet was created in 1989 to Claudio Abbado's great interpretation of the mass with Philharmonic of Vienna, the Choir of Vienna's National Opera and four fantastic soloists.¹ The solemn mass was written and first conducted on the consecration of the Church of the Orphanage by a barely thirteen-year-old Mozart in 1768. It is one of Corpo's masterpieces and it remained in its repertoire for eight consecutive years till 1997. It is the only choreography prior to *21* – the Company's turning point in 1992 when Pederneiras consolidated his celebrated choreographic style – to be part of Corpo's video collection.

¹ German soprano Gundula Janowitz; American mezzo-soprano Federica Von Stade singing as contralto; Polish tenor Wieslaw Ochman; and German bass Kut Moll.

It is possible to see in *Missa do Orfanato* the first signs of Pederneiras' unique style. Grupo Corpo's resident choreographer starts to favor dynamism and the scenic space instead of form on stage. Contrary to the tenets of the Ordinary in the catholic mass – it should be a rite to devotion and praise to the Lord – Rodrigo Pederneiras turns his dancers into the wretched of the Earth, portraying the tragedy and misery of human condition. In permanent contrition, the dancers' bodies move vigorously upward only to return to the floor in a representation of the helplessness, fear, affliction, and loneliness inherent to humanity's inescapable worldly and transitory nature. Arms are stretched like a cross or folded in penitence and their convulsive gestures are cries for mercy. It is the Passion of Man projected on stage.

The scenery was designed on a prototype made of iron slabs and wood planks by Fernando Velloso. Foam and cloth simulate the prototype's heaviness, volume, and rust in the actual scenery exquisitely built by Tatiana Memória at the *Central Técnica de Inhaúma* in Rio de Janeiro. It is a panel in earthy browns and ashy grays, 9 meters high and 18 meters wide, resembling a run-down façade of a monumental building. Fragments of metallic tubes allude to the remains of a church organ, suggesting the ruins of a cathedral. The scenery is crushingly oppressive and reduces the procession of the wretched that ambles on stage clamoring for redemption to its petty dimension.

Freusa Zechmeister's costumes resemble everyday clothing made of silk and raw flax, aged and dyed in gray and earthy brown hues to enhancing the image of a crowd of age-old pilgrims on stage. The disheveled hair and the gray shades applied under the eyes on a layer of pancake make-up reinforce furthermore the idea of a pilgrimage in some dark age.

Multiple gradations of yellow and white light and stage smoke are used by Paulo Pederneiras to envelope the scenery in a thin glazing simulating the light and atmosphere of religious ceremonies. Light and shadows are balanced as in a picture by Caravaggio, playing against each other and emphatically underscoring the choreography, exacerbating its drama.

Grupo Corpo's *Missa do Orfanato* represents the Human Calvary on stage; but redemption, the communion with the Divine – for those on stage and in the audience – comes through art's sublime beauty embodied by this dance company and by the impressive scores of a young Mozart.