

GRUPO CORPO

onqotô

2005

choreography: Rodrigo Pederneiras

music: Caetano Veloso and José Miguel Wisnik

set design and lighting: Paulo Pederneiras

costumes: Freusa Zechmeister

(42 minutes)

It all started when Caetano Veloso thought of writing an essay about the way terms such as “big-bang” (used in languages other than English without any translation) somehow indirectly regard the creation of the universe as a product of a domineering Anglo-Saxon culture. That was the bulk of at least one of the many long conversations the Brazilian composer has had with USP professor José Miguel Wisnik, himself also an essayist and a composer, over thirty years of their friendship. The amusing chat they were having about the beginning of the world was interrupted by thunderous laughter when Wisnik recalled an aphorism by the great Brazilian dramatist and journalist Nelson Rodrigues (1912-1980). Nelson once tried to explain the classic rivalry between two soccer teams from Rio in the following terms: “the Fla-Flu started forty minutes before the void” (Fla-Flu is short for Flamengo vs. Fluminense). From Rodrigues’ witty point of view, the cosmos was otherwise “conceived” as an unmistakably Brazilian expression.

...
*and
the
divine
breath
of
life
sang
fla-flu
let
there
be
light*
...
*and
expelled*

the
universe
from
universe
one

(Caetano Veloso and José Miguel Wisnik)

In 2003, Caetano Veloso and José Miguel Wisnik were invited to work on the soundtrack for a ballet that would celebrate GRUPO CORPO's 30 years of activity in 2005. They did not hesitate: there it was, "howling" (as Nelson Rodrigues himself would say), hanging on that point of that broken conversation they had had, between the explosion and the void: the perfect theme to write the soundtrack. In addition to this "creative divine breath", there came the great metaphysic question that has followed human beings ever since the world exists, or, better said, since human beings are human beings: how to address our perplexity before the mysterious and unspeakable immensity that is the Universe.

***Where can one shelter a weak human being,
Where is one to secure a short life,
And the Skies may not be armed and outraged
Against a earthling so small?***

(from *Os Lusíadas*, by Luís de Camões, music by Caetano Veloso)

CORPO's creative team immediately bought the idea, and it was established as the common thread for the ballet as a whole. The choreography was called *ONQOTÔ*, one of the set of vulgarisms on the existential questions that come up during the performance – "Where am I?", "Where am I going to", "Who am I?"; or, rendered in sheer dialect from Minas Gerais (the Brazilian state where CORPO comes from): "Onqotô?", "Pronqovô", "Qemqosô?". This choreography was chosen to celebrate three decades of GRUPO CORPO.

Big-Bang and Fla-Flu, Candeal and Camões

ONQOTÔ'S 42-minute soundtrack was written by Caetano Veloso and José Miguel Wisnik and produced by Alê Siqueira. It was built around musical and poetic dialogues based on two "primal scenes" (the Big-Bang and the Fla-Flu) and also on the feeling of helplessness inherent to the human condition because of our pettiness before the immensity of the universe.

***On the prayer, which unearths.....the earth,
God wishes that to whom the care is.....given,
One preaches that life is a borrowed.....state,
A thousand mysteries that unearth.....and bury.***

(José Miguel Wisnik on Gregório de Matos' sonnet)

The nine themes of the score were initially recorded in Carlinhos Brown's studio *Ilha dos Sapos*, located in Candeal, Salvador and finished at YB, in São Paulo. They bring together the characteristic vitality of the percussion from Candeal, multiple juxtaposed voices, and interventions of piano, electric guitar, bass, accordion, flutes, and strings. Moments centered on rhythm and timbre take turns with songs filled with soulful lyricism. Rhythm and melody alternate at the center of the soundtrack and give it its distinct identity. The most perfect example of this alternation is the contrast between the participation of the band *Hip-Hop Roots* from Candeal in the final number and the non-professional singer Greice who delivers a solo with innate virtuosity in one of the songs in the soundtrack.

To five tunes specially written by Veloso and Wisnik, four other songs written by them individually were added – two of them on lyrics from classic poets of the Portuguese language. Caetano Veloso wrote music for half a stanza from Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* (the great 15th century Portuguese epic), and José Miguel Wisnik did the same with a 17th century baroque sonnet by Gregório de Matos, from Bahia. Wisnik sings Caetano's song, *Madre Deus*, especially written for the ballet, while Caetano delivers *Pesar do Mundo* by Wisnik and Paulo das Neves, a song originally recorded in Wisnik's first album in 1993 and incorporated to the soundtrack because of the affinity with the "sentimento do mundo" ("the feel of the world", title of a famous poem and a book by the poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade) that permeates the choreography.

...
**Weigh it all
Weigh the burden
Burden of the world
Over itself**
...

(José Miguel Wisnik and Paulo Neves)

In between the floor and the void

With high temperature and density, like a primal ball of fire, *ONQOTÔ* is perhaps the choreography that has the highest number of floor moves of all the 28 ballets created by Rodrigo Pederneiras since 1978 when he started to choreograph for GRUPO CORPO. The dancers seem to be constantly swallowed by an invisible force of gravity, as if they were looking for their own balance within mother earth or simply searching for answers to issues that come up in the poetry of Caetano, Wisnik, Neves, Camões and Gregório. Verticality and horizontality, chaos and order, harshness and tenderness, volume and scarcity contrast and juxtapose each other. They are in tune with (and, sometimes, in sharp opposition to) the soundtrack, unveiling meanings, melodies and rhythms that underscore the sound stimuli, in an impressive communion of movement and sound. Its most explicit expression is those moments when the dancers produce different rhythmic patterns with their feet to the primal beat of the percussionists from Candeal: the original soundtrack is given a new meaning onstage.

The scenery by Paulo Pederneiras takes the traditional black box of the theater apart, doing away with the wings and building a concave space instead. This space is woven with dark leaden rubber straps, each one 12cm-wide and 9mt-high, placed side by side in a curved line. Depending on the light they suggest the earth in a cross-section or a hollow, a black hole, a non-space, nothingness, something primeval. This way, it sets an innovative scenic space, allowing the dancers to get on and off stage from any point of the stage or the backstage.

Following the curve of the scenery and attached to the metal structure that supports the straps, thirty spots light the stage. Paulo Pederneiras uses almost exclusively white and shades of white in his lighting design.

During 37 of the 42 minutes of the performance, Freusa Zechmeister turns the dancers into an anonymous mass that blends into (and turns into) the scenic space, allowing for choreography and scenery to be fully tri-dimensional. In the final number the costume designer "humanizes" each one of the twenty dancers in *ONQOTÔ* by giving them each combination of various pieces that refer to the informal wear typical of dance rehearsals.

...
**before the unfinished
back against the planet
I am the aimless
arrow
instinct and feeling
extinct
but I see me going
and the finished things
much more than beautiful
they will be**

(Caetano Veloso)

Text: **Angela de Almeida**
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