

Brazil's colourful Grupo Corpo a cure for the blues

A dance company from Brazil? From Rio de Janeiro? Sao Paulo? Guess again. How about the eastern city of Belo Horizonte?

Remote from either of the country's twin metropolises, Belo Horizonte might be thought an unlikely source for a dance company active on the international circuit.

But that is where the six brothers and sisters of the Pederneiras family grew up, four of whom became founding members of the Brazilian troupe appearing this week at Harbourfront Centre's Premiere Dance Theatre under the name Grupo Corpo (literally, the Body Group).

The founding took place all of a quarter century ago and today you won't find the Pederneiras name listed any longer on the active roster of 20 athletically handsome dancers. But you will find Rodrigo Pederneiras still listed as founding artistic director and choreographer.

Dubbed the "Jiri Kylian of Brazil," Señor Rodrigo has de-

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vised a signature vocabulary for his energetic movers, combining elements of classical ballet, modern dance and the popular ballroom and folk traditions of his homeland.

Complex? Cerebral? Profound? None of these adjectives seem to fit.

At least in the two-work program on view in Toronto, Grupo Corpo peddles eye candy, confections in body movement, rather than investigations into the deeper recesses of the human condition.

Parabelo (1997), which introduces the program, opens with

an eye-catching image aptly characterized by dance writer Tresca Weinstein as "19 dancers, dressed in iridescent crimson bodysuits, arrayed in crab-walk position on the floor like a colony of fiery grasshoppers."

You can't ignore an image like that, yet Pederneiras develops it only briefly before bringing his dancers to their feet with a sudden change in musical direction and a brightening of the lights and sends them off in the go-go-go sequences of leaps, spins and loose-limbed strutting steps that quickly become identifiable as his style.

It is a style heavily dependent on unisons for its impact. Groups of colourfully costumed dancers doing the same thing at the same time to an energetic beat turn up regularly, with an occasional pas de deux thrown in for contrast.

The choreography wears its heart on the dancers' limbs and appears directed primarily toward showing them off.

They in turn look as if they are having the time of their

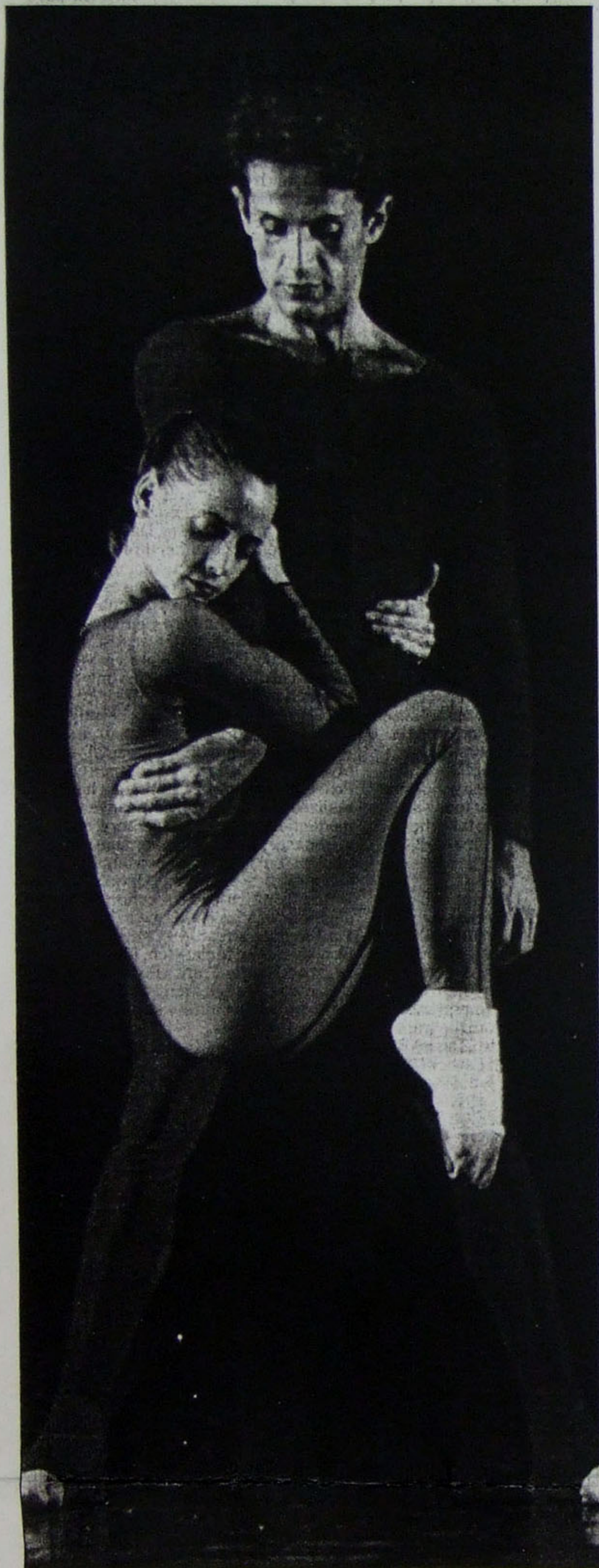
lives.

An elevated walkway co-designed and lit by Paolo Pederneiras turns up in the second piece, *Benguele* (1998), enabling Rodrigo to stretch the dancers in a continuous line across the back of the darkened stage, as if journeying from one place to another.

The title translates loosely as a longing for Africa, so the image is obviously pertinent. The actual steps mix African, Hispanic and other cultures to project a kinetic portrait of the melting pot that is Brazil.

Coming after *Parabelo*, *Benguele* has a "more of the same" quality, inviting the observer to wonder whether a desire to produce instantly legible, feel-good dance has imprisoned Rodrigo Pederneiras in formulas that keep him from stretching himself.

On the other hand, the formulas certainly work. Anyone suffering from the blues can be directed toward the shores of Lake Ontario this week for an instant cure.



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