

A Brazilian Spirit of Abandon Opens Jacob's Pillow

*By Jack Anderson
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Becket, Mass. - The Vitality of Brazil burst into the serene Berkshire Hills when the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival opened its summer season here with performances by the GRUPO CORPO Brazilian Dance Theater. On Friday night this high-powered troupe from Belo Horizonte offered two works by Rodrigo Pederneiras, its resident choreographer, in which highly disciplined dancers often moved as if they were seized by a spirit of uninhibited abandon.

The company, founded in 1975, has been well trained in both classical ballet and modern dance techniques. Although it is not primarily a folkloric ensemble, Pederneiras also borrows from native Brazilian dance traditions. To judge from this program, Grupo Corpo prizes being a group: each work was performed by a cast of 19 dancers. It soon became clear that they were all highly skilled. Yet no single individual was featured for long as a soloist. The company is also in at least one literal sense a family affair: its artistic director and one of its principal designers is Paulo Pederneiras, the choreographer's brother, and Pedro Pederneiras, another brother, is stage manager.

"Parabelo", to taped instrumental and vocal music by Tom Zé and José Miguel Wisnik, was inspired by some of the art and dance styles of a wild and arid region in the northeast of Brazil. Rodrigo Pederneiras's choreography emphasized contrasts between stiff and loose movements. Dancers first seen crouching on the floor stood upright at attention, only to let their bodies soon go slack. Yet moments later, they started jumping vigorously and thrust their limbs sharply into space. At other times, bodies held with a stony rigidity suddenly seemed to melt. "Parabelo" abounded with kinetic surprises.

"Nazareth" also displayed Pederneiras's fondness for alternating taut and droopy sequences. But there these juxtapositions often appeared unduly mannered. Wisnik based his tape score for various instruments on some of the piano music of Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934), who wrote pieces in European forms yet filled them with the rhythms of Brazilian popular songs and dances. Recordings of some of these works are charming indeed. But Wisnik's versions of them sounded affected.

Choreographically, prissy balletic phrases gave way to slinking, and the slinking was often followed by strutting. The dancers performed all this with great enthusiasm but could not avoid giving the impression that Pederneiras was straining for his effects. Whereas Nazareth's compositions can be disarming, this musical and choreographic tribute seemed precious instead.

Nevertheless, the energetic Grupo Corpo certainly created a stir. And the admirably eclectic festival continues through Aug. 29.