

## Celebrating The Past And Looking To The Future: Grupo Corpo Returns To Boston

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By [Lawrence Elizabeth Knox](#)

Grupo Corpo performing "Suíte Branca." (Courtesy Jose Luiz Pederneiras)

*This article is more than 2 years old.*

Over the last few years, the Brazilian contemporary dance company [Grupo Corpo](#) has relished in a time of reflection — looking back while simultaneously planning forward.

“The idea was to create a tribute with people that have been working with us, have worked with us, people that have already gone, people that’s still here,” said resident choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras of his 2015 work “Dança Sinfônica,” which he created in honor of the troupe’s 40th anniversary.



Grupo Corpo performing resident choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras's 2015 work "Dança Sinfônica." (Courtesy Jose Luiz Pederneiras)

This weekend, 19 of the company's virtuosic dancers will perform this celebratory piece alongside "Suíte Branca" by Cassi Abranches at the [Boch Center Shubert Theatre](#), where they made their Boston debut in 2013. The program, presented by the Celebrity Series of Boston, is part of the troupe's latest North American tour.

Founded in 1975, Grupo Corpo has been a family affair since the beginning when six siblings — four brothers and two sisters — joined forces to establish their own arts organization. Four remain involved – Paulo as the founder and artistic director, Pedro as the technical director, Miriam as a choreographic assistant and of course Rodrigo, who created the company's seductive style of movement.

Grupo Corpo 2016 - Montevideú/Uruguai





“Not really create,” Pederneiras said hesitantly. Rather, he took what was already available from different kinds of dance and different parts of the country, he explained, and in a way, repurposed it. He transformed multiple styles into a single, unique language that has become representative not only of their company, but also of their country and their culture.

“Brazilian people have a very special and a very particular way to walk, to dance, to move,” Pederneiras said. “All the movements start on the hips. It’s fantastic. We try to bring this kind of sensuality to our way of work.”

Grupo Corpo typifies a perfectly refined, yet complex blend of the culture’s traditional styles of movement, from samba and forro to xaxado and capoeira among others, with Brazilian street dance, a classical form of technique and a contemporary approach. Pederneiras is particularly attracted to dance styles found in Northeast Brazil, a region highly permeated by dynamic African influences in all aspects of life. The South is more European, he explained.



Grupo Corpo performing "Dança Sinfônica." (Courtesy Jose Luiz Pederneiras)

Music is equally embedded in Brazil's culture, and for nearly 26 years, Grupo Corpo has commissioned the accompaniment for each new work. "Dança Sinfônica" marks the fifth collaboration between Pederneiras and Marco Antônio Guimarães, who wrote the score for the 90-member Philharmonic Orchestra of Minas Gerais.

Revisiting evocative musical passages and past repertoire, the piece is wholly retrospective, even featuring a memorable set design by Paulo Pederneiras. Over a thousand photographs of those who have collaborated or influenced Grupo Corpo in some way — from dancers to technicians to stewards — are joined together in a collage of sorts that covers the backdrop.

GRUPO CORPO 40 ANOS - DANÇA SINFÔNICA



“Suíte Branca (White Suite),” on the other hand, was intended to instate another beginning for the company. Since 1981, Pederneiras has been the sole choreographer, but now at 62 years old, he is seeking other creators to share in the legacy, to expand the repertoire and to ultimately continue his work.

“‘White Suite’ is kind of a piece of paper where we are going to start a new history,” he said. In searching for a choreographer who shares an innate understanding of their mission and their movement, he didn’t have to look far. Cassi Abranches was a member of the troupe for 12 years.



Grupo Corpo performing "Suíte Branca." (Courtesy Jose Luiz Pederneiras)

Playing with the idea of shifting weight, Abranches examines how the body is impacted by gravity in this abstract work. Dressed in white from start to finish, the dancers partner each other through sequences in which they appear to be floating against the disheveled white backdrop and above the glacial landscape that is the floor. At other times, the motion is more staccato, the dancers' limbs reacting as if one let go of the strings that were holding them up for a moment.

Regardless, throughout the program, the dancers' hips lead their movements and the rest of their bodies simply follow, swinging from side to side through complex choreography with such ease. It is an exploration. It is what Pederneiras calls "dance inside our body."

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*Grupo Corpo performs Friday, Jan. 26 to Sunday, Jan. 28 at the [Boch Center Shubert Theatre](#).*

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