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JANUARY 22, 2018 · 6:00 PM

Brazilian Dance Troupe Grupo Corpo Bewitching in Program at Playhouse Square

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Grupo Corpo in Cassi Abranches' "Suíte Branca." Photo by Jose Luiz Pederneiras.

Reviewed by Steve Sucato

After more than a decade of trying to book Brazilian dance super group [Grupo Corpo](#), [DANCECleveland](#) executive director Pamela Young finally got what she desired. This past weekend the troupe, co-presented by [DANCECleveland](#) and Cuyahoga Community College, wowed audiences at [Playhouse Square](#)'s Ohio Theatre proving the wait was well worth it and in the process fueled an appetite to see even more from the troupe.

The globally popular Grupo Corpo (meaning "body group" in English) is known for their stylistically unique group works mixing classical technique, modern dance and Afro-Brazilian forms. Their program Saturday night was no different. What

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Set to an original instrumental score by Samuel Rosa the frontman for Skank – one of Brazil’s best-known pop rock bands, 19-dancers costumed in all white entered in stages a white on white stage design —whose rumpled backdrop had the look of a mountainous glacier — beginning with short solo by petite powerhouse Dayanne Amaral.

Having danced Pederneiras’ works from 2001-2013, it was clear with Abranches’ choreography that the apple hadn’t fallen too far from the tree. The familiar, relaxed, lead with the hip movement language of Pederneiras was evident in the work yet Abranches managed to take it in differing and interesting directions. Leg-bicycling leaps, weight-sharing movements, dancers wriggling on their backs and rolling across the stage floor, and pendular movements and suspensions a la Michael Jackson’s groundbreaking 1988 music video “Smooth Criminal,” suggested a testing of the laws of gravity.



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While Abranches' "Suíte Branca" was an introduction to the future of Grupo Corpo, Pederneiras' "Dança Sinfônica" that came next, was a nostalgic look back at its past.

Danced to a recorded symphonic score that featured music from several the company's recent works composed by Marco Antônio Guimarães and performed by the Philharmonic Orchestra of Minas Gerais and Brazilian instrumental group Uakti, the 42-minute group work combined "a memorialist theme" with reprised and original choreography.

In contrast to the stark white set and costume design of "Suíte Branca," "Dança Sinfônica" showcased crimson red side curtains and a panel backdrop containing a collage of 1080 informal photos of Grupo Corpo's dancers, ballet masters, teachers, producers, and set designers and lighting and costume technicians from over the past four decades.



Grupo Corpo in Rodrigo Pederneiras' "Dança Sinfônica." Photo by Jose Luiz Pederneiras.

As with "Suíte Branca," Amaral opened "Dança Sinfônica" with a solo. As she danced, male/female couples began filtering onto the stage with the women lifted and carried in standing positions and the men walking backwards as Amaral's bouncy solo weaved in and around them.

Like a greatest hits of Pederneiras' choreography, "Dança Sinfônica" contained all the rhythmic hops, swivels, gyrations, stomps, stamps, shuffles and undulations that have helped define the company's unique movement language. After decades of crafting this style, there is a palpable sophistication, precision and beauty to Pederneiras' choreography that one hopes Abranches and future choreographers for the company will be able to achieve.



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Grupo Corpo in Rodrigo Pederneiras' "Dança Sinfônica." Photo by Jose Luiz Pederneiras.

Leaning more heavily on the excellent group work of the piece's 17 adroit dancers, like "Suíte Branca," individual standout moments surfaced. One such moment was a pas de deux in spotlight between Gaspar and dancer Edmárcio Junior. Infused with grace and sensuality, the beautiful partnering sequence between the two dancers once again involved Gaspar being airborne for much of it. Her ability to be as rigid as a board one moment, then as airy as a jellyfish the next, spoke to her versatility and talent as a dancer.

Also making an impression was a bravura solo by Elias Bouza toward the end of the work that earned him around of applause from the audience.

With its majestic soundtrack, fabulous choreography and dancing, "Dança Sinfônica" had all the hallmarks of becoming a signature work for the company.

While Grupo Corpo's program at Playhouse Square proved the company is worthy of its universal acclaim. Surprisingly in the copycat world of dance, few, if any, major North American or European dance companies have embraced Grupo Corpo's movement style or repertory. The troupe remains one-of-a-kind and one local dance fans hope they will not have to wait another decade to see again.

Next on DANCECleveland's 2017-18 season, all-male Argentinean dance company Che Malambo, co-presented with Cuyahoga Community College. 7:30 p.m., Saturday, March 17 at Playhouse Square's Ohio Theatre, 1511 Euclid Ave., Cleveland. \$25-\$60. (216) 241-6000 or playhousesquare.org/events/detail/che-malambo

Suíte Branca – Ocupação Gr...



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Steve Sucato is a former dancer turned arts writer/critic. He is Chairman Emeritus of the Dance Critics Association and Associate Editor of [ExploreDance.com](https://exploredance.com).

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