

Friday and Saturday, April 25–26, 2025, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Grupo Corpo

Artistic Director
Paulo Pederneiras

Choreographers
Rodrigo Pederneiras
Cassi Abranches

Dancers
Ágatha Faro, Bianca Victal, Carlos Nunes, Davi Gabriel,
Dayanne Amaral, Débora Roots, Edésio Nunes, Giulia Madureira,
Hiago Castro, Isabella Accorsi, Jônatas Itaparica, Jonathan de Paula,
Karen Rangel, Luan Barcelos, Lucas Saraiva, Malu Figueirôa,
Pablo Garcia, Rafael Bittar, Rafaela Fernandes, Tris Martins,
Vitória Lopes, Walleyson Malaquias

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Above: Rodrigo Pederneiras' *21*. **Below:** Rodrigo Pederneiras' *Gira*.
Photos by José Luiz Pederneiras.



PROGRAM

21

(1992)

<i>Choreography</i>	Rodrigo Pederneiras
<i>Music</i>	Marco Antônio Guimarães Uakti
<i>Set Design</i>	Fernando Velloso
<i>Costume Design</i>	Freusa Zechmeister
<i>Lighting</i>	Paulo Pederneiras

INTERMISSION

Gira

(2017)

(Bay Area Premiere)

<i>Choreography</i>	Rodrigo Pederneiras
<i>Music</i>	Metá Metá
<i>Set Design</i>	Paulo Pederneiras
<i>Costume Design</i>	Freusa Zechmeister
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Paulo Pederneiras and Gabriel Pederneiras



Rodrigo Pederneiras' 21. Photos by José Luiz Pederneiras.



They are from Minas Gerais, Brazil, but their ballet crosses borders. Brazil as a whole—with all its cultural diversity—can see itself mirrored in the work of **Grupo Corpo**, the dance company founded in 1975 in Belo Horizonte. In a world where the speed of information produces an increasingly homogeneous landscape, these artists stand out for having developed a signature of their very own.

There are three basic reasons for the uniqueness of the company. First, there is Rodrigo Pederneiras, Grupo Corpo's house choreographer: one of the few dance makers able to mix classical ballet and folk dance and then set to motion bodies that push the limits of technical rigor. Second, the wisdom with which Paulo Pederneiras transforms choreography into a dance artworks. Besides directing the company, Rodrigo designs the sets and lighting that customize the scenic "finish" of each production with a kind of quality that continues to introduce new references. And third, there is a balanced cast of dancers—each a star in their own right—fine-tuning each other's performances with exquisite precision.

When one sees Grupo Corpo dance on stage, it is as if all questions concerning the relationship between nature and culture are being fully answered. All facets of Brazil—past and future, erudite and popular, foreign influence and local color, the urban and the suburban—come into focus as art. Brazilian art. World art.

—Helena Katz

21 (1992)

After several years of creating ballets danced to classical music, Paulo and Rodrigo Pederneiras felt a need to create another kind of music—music that would "dance" to Grupo Corpo. And there was nobody better to work with than Marco Antônio Guimarães, the leader, composer, and creator of the unusual instruments used by another group of artists from Minas Gerais, the Uakti

Instrumental Workshop, with whom the Pederneiras brothers had successfully worked earlier, in 1988.

Created in 1992, *21* was a turning point for Grupo Corpo. Not only did company members now find themselves dancing regularly to music written exclusively for them—they had done so before, early on, in the hits *Maria, Maria* and *Último Trem* (both with soundtracks by Milton Nascimento and Fernando Brant)—but they also established this practice as new house rule. This allowed Rodrigo Pederneiras to begin building the extensive movement vocabulary with markedly Brazilianist inflections that would become a company trademark.

At the start, a web of combinations of rhythms and tonalities based on the number 21 was written on special "geometric scores" created by Guimarães, Uakti's artistic director and the designer of the instruments that give the music its distinctive sound. In other words, these sheets used geometric figures to indicate tempo changes without suggesting melody or harmony, a process that left a huge amount of room for improvisation. There, among the circles, triangles, squares, pentagons, and hexagons of Guimarães' unique notation, was the seed of *21*.

This remarkable music pulsed with certain kind of mathematical flavor and was instrumental in creating the strongest Grupo Corpo ballet to date. Through multiple repetitions of movement, it reproduced a downward scale from 21 to 1; then it built eight small choreographic "haikus"; and finally reached its climax in a colorful and infectiously enthusiastic section that references Brazilian folk dances and countryside parties. The reds of the downstage lighting and the yellows of dancers' costumes created a tension that set the tone for the first section of the ballet, while a gigantic quilt full of vibrant colors anticipated the climactic conclusion, with skin-tight costumes alluding to the patchwork scenery.



Gira (2017)

Gira: noun, Brazilian Portuguese
[From *quimbundo njila*, “spin”; from *quicongonzila*, “path”]

In Angola-Congo nations, types of Candomblé and Umbanda gatherings feature congregations coming together to worship the deities (spiritual beings) of the *terreiro* (a site of worship in Candomblé) with chants and ritual dances (usually performed by spinning in circles).

The rituals of Umbanda—the most popular of the Brazil-born religions and the result of the merger of Candomblé with Catholicism and Kardecist spiritism—are the great source of inspiration for the aesthetics of *Gira*, which features choreography by Rodrigo Pederneiras, set design by Paulo Pederneiras, lighting by Paulo and Gabriel Pederneiras, and costumes by Freusa Zechmeister. Metá Metá, a jazz band from São Paulo, wrote the soundtrack, which also features two special guests: poet, essayist, and artist Nuno Ramos, and vocalist Elza Soares.

Eshu is the most human of the *orixás*—deities in the Yoruba religion of West Africa, and in the Afro-Brazilian religions of Candomblé and Umbanda. The *orixás* are supernatural beings that are believed to have human characteristics, without whom the rituals simply couldn't take place. And it is Eshu who guides and stages *Gira* as its driving force. In African cosmology, Eshu represents the dynamic principle, without which all would be static; Eshu is the messenger between the spirit world and the material world; a god of infinite expansion and multiplication, lord of all paths and crossroads, the master of all order and confusion. Each of the 11 pieces that Metá Metá wrote the work was inspired by Eshu.

In creating *Gira*, the artistic collaborators of Grupo Corpo had to delve into the universe of Afro-Brazilian religions in preparation for approaching Metá Metá's musical

themes. However, the performance is far from a formal representation of these syncretic rituals. Instead, choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras re-constructs the powerful glossary of gestures and movement he accessed as he experienced the rites of Candomblé and Umbanda, particularly Eshu ceremonies (*giras de Exu*).

Paulo Pederneiras conceived the stage design as an installation or a “non-setting,” in which he covers the dancers' bodies with the same black tulle as used on the three walls of the “black box,” turning them into a kind of “ether” and creating an eerie atmosphere that suggests endlessness.

Paulo Pederneiras' set design uses a black linoleum “square” (13 meters x 9 meters), brightly lit, demarcating the stage area where the *gira* will take place in a symbolic representation of a *terreiro*. On both sides and at the bottom of the stage, where the quick-change rooms are usually located (and traditionally are invisible to the audience), 21 chairs are placed in an area bathed in shadow, forming a kind of arena. On each chair, a faint light indicates an incorporeal presence.

At the beginning of the piece, a group of seven dancers occupies the center of the stage. They have their hands crossed on the left side of their hips, eyes closed, their upper bodies bent over themselves as they form loose circles; everything suggests that they are in a trance. This introduces the volatile character of the rest of the work.

Group formations (usually with seven dancers) are recurrent, interrupted by brief trios, duos, or solos. Performed to the sound of a rhythmic track, two melodic moments give way to the materialization of female solos, danced to the voice of instruments that seem equally lonely.

For the dancers, Freusa Zechmeister adopts a similar language for the costumes of the entire cast, regardless of gender: naked torsos, with the other half of the body covered with primitive-cut white skirts and raw fabric.

The contemporary Brazilian dance company **Grupo Corpo**, founded by Paulo Pederneiras in 1975 in Belo Horizonte, State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, presented its first work, *Maria Maria*, the very next year. Featuring original music by Milton Nascimento, a script by Fernando Brandt, and choreography by the Argentine Oscar Araiz, the ballet would go on to spend six years on stage and tour 14 countries. But even though the piece was an immediate critical, popular, and commercial success, the group's distinctive identity, its long-term popularity, and its artistic achievements have been the fruits of a long, arduous journey. As a result, Grupo Corpo began operating in its own premises as of 1978.

While the success of *Maria Maria* was still reverberating throughout Brazil and in various European and Latin American countries, Grupo Corpo (literally "Body Group") never stopped working, staging six productions between 1976 and 1982. During the first phase of this development, the influence of Araiz, who in 1980 would create *O Último Trem*, was evident in varying degrees. However, the company's distinctive features and personality were chiefly molded by Paulo Pederneiras, the man responsible for the artistic direction as well as the sets and lighting of the performances, and dancer Rodrigo Pederneiras, who left the stage in 1981 to assume the role of full-time choreographer.

In 1985, the company launched its second great success, *Prelúdios*, a theatrical piece incorporating 24 Chopin preludes interpreted by pianist Nelson Freire. The show debuted to public and critical acclaim at the First International Dance Festival of Rio de Janeiro and went on to cement Grupo Corpo's reputation in the world of contemporary Brazilian dance.

The company then entered a new phase, during which it firmly established its own unique theatrical language and approach to

choreography. Beginning with an sophisticated repertoire featuring music by Heitor Villa-Lobos, Richard Strauss, and Edward Elgar, among others, the company began combining classical technique with a contemporary re-reading of popular Brazilian dance forms. This would ultimately become the group's trademark.

In 1989 Grupo Corpo debuted *Missa do Orfanato*, a complex theatrical reading of Mozart's *Missa Solemnis* (K. 139). Nearly operatic in dimensions, the ballet became an esthetic milestone in the group's history.

The company underwent a radical transformation three years later with the production of *21*, a ballet that confirmed the originality of Rodrigo Pederneiras' choreography and Grupo Corpo's singular persona. Utilizing the unique sounds of the Brazilian instrumental group Uakti, as well as a selection of themes composed by Marco Antônio Guimarães, *21* moved beyond the group's former preoccupation with technical form and saw it deconstructing melodies and rhythms to explore the works' underlying ideas. The decision to once again use original music—a mark of the group's first three productions in the 1970s—allowed Grupo Corpo to further explore the language of popular Brazilian dance.

In the work that followed, *Nazareth* (1993), Rodrigo Pederneiras' fascination with traversing the worlds of both popular and erudite music found a perfect opportunity for fuller expression. Inspired by the verbal games of Brazilian literary icon Machado de Assis (1839–1908) and the works of Ernesto Nazareth (1863–1934), a seminal figure in the formation of Brazilian popular music, the work was scored by composer and literary theorist José Miguel Wisnik. Though built on a solid, classical foundation, the production combined—in good-humored fashion—the light-hearted and sensual elements inherent in Brazilian popular dances.

The ongoing partnership between Grupo Corpo and contemporary authors has been a great success and the scores composed specifically for the company have become the norm, with each one inspiring a new creation. An exception came in 2004 with the production of *Lecuona*, a work that drew on 13 love songs by Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona (1895–1963), in which Rodrigo Pederneiras demonstrated his gift for the creation of *pas-de-deux*.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Grupo Corpo increased its international touring. Between 1996 and 1999, it was the resident dance company of the Maison de la Danse in Lyon, France. Several of the group's creations (*Bach*, *Parabelo*, and *Benguelê*) were first staged in Europe during this period.

Today, having created more than 40 works of choreography, Grupo Corpo gives regular performances worldwide, from Italy, France, the Netherlands, Iceland, Lebanon, and Israel, to the United States, Canada, Mexico, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea.

Grupo Corpo has drawn on from countless inspirations—the minimalism of Philip Glass; the vigorous pop and urban sounds of Arnaldo Antunes; the primordial experimentalism of Tom Zé; the African sensibility of João Bosco; the metaphysical verse of Luís de Camões and Gregório de Mattos with the light touch of Caetano Veloso and Wisnik; the rootsy modernity of Lenine; the

sound diversity of Moreno, Domenico, and Kassín; the contemporary vision of Martin Codax's medieval songs by Carlos Núñez and José Miguel Wisnik; the pop style of Samuel Rosa; the musical genius of Gilberto Gil—to produce programs of very diverse character: cerebral, cosmopolitan, primitive, existential, tough—while always celebrating the company's distinctive traits.

Ana Paula Cançado and

Mariana do Rosário, *répétitrices*

Carmen Purri, *education director*

Elias Bouza, *maître de ballet*

Anna Maria Ferreira, *pianist*

Pedro Pederneiras, *director of stage engineering*

Gabriel Pederneiras, *technical director*

Átilla Gomes, Murilo Oliveira, *technicians*

Alexandre Vasconcelos and Maria Luiza

Magalhães, *wardrobe assistants*

Marcello Cláudio Teixeira, *administrator*

Kênia Marques *administrative manager*

Antônio Emídio Resende, *financial manager*

Flávia Labbate, *secretary*

Cristina Castilho, *communication director*

Cláudia Ribeiro, *program director*

Michelle Deslandes, *executive producer*

Gabi Junqueira, *production assistant*

Miriam Pederneiras, *director of social projects*

Instituto Cultural Corpo, *production*