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Grupo Corpo Returns to the Mondavi Center with “Breu”

Davis, Calif.—**Grupo Corpo**, Brazil’s most successful dance troupe, returns to **the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**, UC Davis, on **Friday, March 13**, at **8 p.m.** in **Jackson Hall**. The evening’s program comprises “Seven or Eight Pieces for a Ballet” and the new work “Breu,” both choreographed by **Rodrigo Pederneiras**.

Jeremy Ganter, Mondavi Center associate executive director, speaks during a **Pre-Performance Lecture** at **7 p.m.** in the **AGR Room** of the **Buehler Alumni and Visitors Center**, adjacent to the Mondavi Center. **Ruth Rosenberg**, Mondavi Center dance consultant, moderates a **Post-Performance Q&A** in Jackson Hall.

Grupo Corpo (literally “Body Group” in English) combines the sensuality of Afro-Brazilian dance forms, the liquid swing of jazz, and the technical prowess of ballet with energy to burn. Says **Ganter**, “In a few short years, Grupo Corpo has made a rapid ascent to the top of the Mondavi Center’s most-requested list. They have been a fantastic partner in our mission to help develop modern dance audiences in Northern California, and it’s a pleasure to have them returning to UC Davis once again.”

Pricing is \$45/35/25 for regular tickets and \$22.50/17.50/12.50 for students and children. Purchase tickets online at MondaviArts.org, through the Mondavi Center box office at 530-754-2787 or 866-754-2787 (toll-free), or at the door. Accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. This event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center’s **Dance Series**, which concludes with **Ballet Preljocaj** on **April 17**.

The contemporary Brazilian dance company **Grupo Corpo**, founded in 1975, debuted 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 artistic identity, its long-term popularity and its artistic achievements have been the fruits of a long, arduous journey. As a result, the group started 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 never stopped working, staging no less than six productions between 1976 and 1982. In the first phase of the group’s existence, the influence of Araiz, who in 1980 would write “O Último Trem,” was evident in varying degrees in the dance troupe’s work. However, the company’s distinctive features and personality were chiefly molded by two of its founders: the dancer **Rodrigo Pederneiras**, who left the stage in 1981 to assume the role of full-time choreographer, and **Paulo Pederneiras**, the artistic director of the company and the man responsible for lighting the group’s performances.

In 1985, the company launched what would be its second great success: “Prelúdios,” a theatrical piece incorporating 24 Chopin preludes interpreted by pianist Nelson Freire. It was the group’s first collaboration with **Freusa Zechmeister**, who remains the company’s costume designer. The show debuted to public and critical acclaim at the First International Dance Festival of Rio de Janeiro and would cement the group’s reputation in the world of contemporary Brazilian dance.

Grupo Corpo then entered a new phase, establishing its own unique theatrical language and choreography. Starting with an erudite repertoire featuring the works of Richard Strauss, Heitor Villa-Lobos and Edward Elgar, among others, the company began combining classical technique with a contemporary re-reading of popular Brazilian dance forms. This would become the group's trademark.

In 1989, the creative nucleus of the company gained another important collaborator in artist **Fernando Velloso**. Alongside Zechmeister and Paulo Pederneiras, Velloso helped establish the group's visual identity, acting as set designer until 2002, when Paulo Pederneiras took over the responsibility.

In the same year the group debuted "Missa do Orfanato," a complex theatrical reading of Mozart's Missa solemnis (K.139). Almost operatic in dimensions, this ballet became such an esthetic triumph that, nearly two decades later, it remains in the company's repertoire.

The group underwent a radical transformation three years later with the production of "21," a ballet that confirmed the uniqueness of Rodrigo Pederneiras's choreography and the unmistakable persona of the dance troupe. Using the singular sounds of Brazilian instrumental group Uakti, as well as 10 themes composed by Marco Antônio Guimarães, "21" leaves behind the group's preoccupation with technical form and sees it taking apart melodies and rhythms in order to explore their underlying ideas. The decision to once again use specifically composed scores—a mark of the group's first three shows in the 1970s—allowed it to explore further the language of popular Brazilian dance.

In the work that followed, "Nazareth," Rodrigo Pederneiras's 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 by 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 brought together in good-humored fashion the light-hearted and sensual elements inherent Brazilian popular dances.

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

Beginning in the mid-1990s, nearly two decades after its inception, Grupo Corpo intensified 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 were first staged in Europe over this period.

Today, having created 33 choreographies and more than 2,200 pieces, the Brazilian dance company maintains 10 ballets in its repertoire and gives 80 performances a year in places as distinctive as Iceland and South Korea, the United States and Lebanon, Canada, Italy, Singapore, the Netherlands, Israel, France, Japan and Costa Rica. Read more at www.grupocorpo.com.br/site.

- **Grupo Corpo**
- **Fri., March 13, 8 p.m.**
- **Mondavi Center, Jackson Hall**
- **9399 Old Davis Road, Davis, CA 95616 (GPS)**
- **\$45/35/25 regular; \$22.50/17.50/12.50 students, children**
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