



# DANCE TALKS NOTES

WRITINGS TO GIVE AUDIENCES A BROADER CONTEXT FOR EXPERIENCING WORKS ON THE JOYCE STAGE.



GET CLOSER TO DANCE

## BRAZIL FESTIVAL

by Charmaine Warren

Brazilians dance. Even more, dance in Brazil is always celebrated by the masses during of the country's largest fête – Carnival. To be sure, there are many types of traditional Afro-Brazilian dances including Capoeira and Samba. Capoeira was born from the slave's masked rendition of fighting done to keep slave owners away, and Samba was shaped when slaves were forced to practice Christianity instead of their own African Traditional Religions. There are also borrowed Latin dances such as the Argentinian Tango, and the Cuban and Puerto Rican Salsa. All in all, Brazilians gathered to party, sing, and dance no matter the deterrents. In many parts of Brazil, tradition abounds in the contemporary works of choreographers as they draw from social dance traditions to infuse their new dance language. Today's Brazilian dance-makers, in creating their own blended dance language, take it even further, suffusing varied styles, including break dance and hip hop from the favelas (an urban area; shanty town), social dance forms (ballroom, the lindy hop), contemporary styles (Pina Bausch-esque, modern dance techniques), plus they travel to study other techniques from Europe and the US. For The Joyce Theater's Brazil Festival, four standout Brazilian companies were chosen — Mimulus Companhia de Dança, Companhia Urbana de Dança, Focus Cia de Dança and DanceBrazil — to fulfill the "...aesthetic sensibility of Brazil - the inspiration for this sensational festival..." and because they are "...some of the most exciting artists performing anywhere today," according to The Joyce. Be ready to see clichés turned upside down in their individual versions of dance from Brazil.

### ABOUT THE COMPANIES:

*New York Times* dance writer, Jennifer Dunning once said, "Jomar Mesquita and his Mimulus Dance Company ought to be bottled and sold as elixir." At 20 years old, Mimulus Dance Company, under artistic director Mesquita and based in Belo Horizonte, continue to wow dance audiences while teaching about Brazilian dance through their story dances. Since 2005, the entire company has been a part of making the works, this Mesquita confirms in an interview for *Canadian.com* in 2008. He says, "When we're creating a new show, we don't worry about fusion. We just create a dance. It doesn't matter in which style." *Dolores*, the 2007 work choreographed by Mesquita and members of the company will have its New York debut at The Joyce. Based on the films by award-winning and controversial Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar, in *Dolores*, like Almodóvar's film, "...women make out, men grab men's butts, and ambiguity rules," writes dance blogger Frances Clement.

At 10 years old, the initially known, all-male group from Rio de Janeiro, Companhia Urbana de Dança, now includes a female dancer. Artistic director, Sonia Destri Lie explains that in the early years rehearsals ran from 11pm to 3am and women were not available because they lived so far away from the city. Lie formed the company with Tiago Sousa, but is now the sole director of these "[eight] terrific dancers [who] mix hip-hop and modern-dance moves...to an artistic end and not merely as exhibitionism..." notes Robert Gottlieb of *The New York Observer*. These accolades come because Destri's training in theater and Baush-esque style seamlessly integrates with the street forms (hip hop and b-boying) from the members of the company. For *The New York Times*, Gia Kourlas wrote, "[Destri] dissected hip hop and dismantled its trickery, essentially smoothing out its brittle edges and posturing to show how the dance form — usually smothered by the fanfaronade of its practitioners — could enter into the realm of art... The men can dance," continues Kourlas, "but they are also lucky: [Destri] is their eye."

Urbana will present Destri's *ID: Entidades* (2009) a pensive work, framed by lighting that crops bodies, slows and speeds up showing off the individual dancers, and *Na Pista* (2012), a take on the chair dance colored with throw back moves, squeaky sneakers, and peppered with sundry music.

Alex Neoral was one of a group of dancers who attended the same academy, and who in 1996 was asked to choreograph something— thus began Focus Cia de Dança. Now 18 years later, there are nearly 20 works on Focus Cia de Dança's roster. Neoral knew he wanted to make work in his early years, training in jazz and tap classes in Rio de Janeiro. Music was also a reason for him to make dances. In an interview for CompanyE-Cine Films, he confirms, "The music for me is very important. Now it is impossible when I listen to any music to not imagine the choreography: a piece happens on my mind instantly." *Canções Que Você Dançou Pra Mim* (The Songs You Danced For Me) brings both of Neoral's desires together. To a total of 72 songs by Elvis Presley inspired, Brazilian singer-songwriter Roberto Carlos, groovy couples sometimes dance to the words, sing, frolic, show lots of emotions, kiss a lot, and for long periods. Neoral offers "... my vision of the songs [are] on the stage... Anyone who watched lived many emotions." *Canções...* is described by *City Guide New York* as "...a romantic romp...from the 60s to the 90s... [that]...create the perfect backdrop for the four pairs of dancers who act out an enthralling narrative in this musical scene."

Living in both Brazil and New York, artistic director and choreographer Mestre Jelon Viera has made a name for DanceBrazil with help from the likes of Alvin Ailey and Loremil Machado. Beginning in 1977 until their official premiere at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall just years later, and until now, Viera's DanceBrazil has been a major voice in the dance community, spreading the word about the cultural tapestry of dance in Brazil. In fact, Viera and friend, Machado, were the first to bring Capoeira to the U.S. and since then the company has been known for its fusion of Afro-Brazilian movement, contemporary dance, and the traditional Brazilian folk dance—Capoeira. Viera's eyes light up, exclaims Sayna Samuels of *Dance Magazine*, when he talks about Capoeira. "I love Capoeira," he told her. "It is so rooted in my blood, my spirit, my soul, and my mind that I feel I am Capoeira." Giving credence to the art of Capoeira, Viera notes that studying Capoeira means respecting the history that it holds. Therefore, he brings both worlds together in his works. Viera essentially goes home to Bahia, where he was born and raised, for inspiration in his 2013 work, *Fé do Sertão*. The design of *Fé do Sertão* is fed by examining the culture and rural area of Sertão in Northeastern Brazil, the differing climate, the many lean months during harvest time, and celebrating the saint São João. For *The New York Times*, Alastair Macauley wrote, "During the course of the dances [in *Fé do Sertão*] various gestures and actions suggest patient waiting, rain, intense harvest work and the changing life of a community across the cycle of the year...The dancers, engaging from the first, glow enthusiastically as they let rip at highest energy." Two premiere works— *Búzios* and *Gueto*—will round out the DanceBrazil program.

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