

# Grupo de Rua de Niteroi

## Playhouse

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Implausible energy ... Grupo de Rua de Niteroi. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod

A sentence shines appealingly across a huge stage screen: "Hip hope loves the beat of music." Three dancers step into squares of light and whip into what the audience has come to see - head-spins and stands, hand-jumps, turns, tumbles, all so fast that it's over before you can take a breath. Then they're gone. One word at a time is removed from the sentence above. "Music" is the first to go. A solo dancer steps out and doesn't move. Then he does. Then he doesn't. He body-pops and locks with the attitude of a boxer. Gradually, "the beat of" disappears, and "loves" comes into focus - 10 big guys turn to each other in a fun-fuelled snog.

But after that we're in a no-man's land. The middle section of this hour-long performance, choreographed by young Brazilian Bruno Beltrao, sets a more monotonous pace that has spectators at best curious, at worst walking out. The performers - solo, two by two, four by four - make their shoes screech like tires as they run in reverse. Steps are improvised, repeated, taking them nowhere recognisable. There is no music, just an electronic whine and a sound like a Buddhist bell. As "hip" is singled out on the screen, the company risk losing us.

The tension is suddenly, surprisingly broken when the funky sounds of French band CQMD rush to fill the space and the full company of men respond with a surge of almost implausible energy. In the final minutes of H2 (aka Hip Hop), dance is reunited with music, and the previous downbeat segment makes complete sense. It's where these men, no ordinary street dancers, are at: raw 21st-century expression, sullen and daringly obscure in parts, vivid and reassuring in others, and sometimes extraordinarily brilliant. Next time you walk out of a show, try running home backwards - fast.