



DANCE REVIEW | GRUPO DE RUA

Male troupe creates art with an attitude

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By Barbara Zuck

The local premiere of the Brazilian dance company Grupo de Rua offered a daring study in contrasts last night in *H3*, a recent work by the troupe's artistic director and choreographer, Bruno Beltrao.

The hourlong piece, performed at Ohio State University's Thurber Theatre under the auspices of the Wexner Center for the Arts, brimmed with the feel of the streets - even without skateboards, asphalt and parking lots. But its hip-hop attitude had been cleaned up, sped up and transformed into something virtuosic, even if that virtuosity was downplayed by the nine men who danced it.

H3 was performed on a bare stage with bare walls. There was no sense of refinement and no place to hide. The look lent a sense of informality and casualness to the proceedings.

Yet *H3* is anything but casual in content. The piece and the performers have the attitude of warriors. *H3* is about battles, urban warfare and male posturing, with all the swaggering and inflated chests those terms suggest.

As in an updated, transported West Side Story, the men mock each other, test each other and seem to be itching for a fight. (A score by Bernstein was, alas, decidedly lacking, as was any consistent musical accompaniment.)

The young all-male company was full of bold moves, yet the dancers don't really let on as much. They executed huge airborne turns, superfast spins and difficult partnering in an almost off-handed way - even though a dancer might have been seriously hurt by a small misstep or split-second mistake in timing.

These men are hunters, fighters, competitors - and seem to relish the sense of danger in the physicality of their performances. As the dance proceeded, the pace quickened, until running and leaping became the common threads. Forward or backward, the dancers moved at an ever-more-frantic pace.

To North Americans, Latin men often seem macho. They have a pride in their physicality that has vanished - if it hasn't been banished - from offices, boardrooms and other havens of "polite" society.

In *H3*, Beltrao and his company have once again unleashed the primal male, and turned attitude into art.

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