



INTERVIEW WITH
ROBERTO PEREIRA

CRISTIANE BOUGER for RELÂCHE – CASA HOFFMANN e-MAGAZINE | 2004

ROBERTO PEREIRA is dance critic at *Jornal do Brasil*, director and professor at the Dance College of UniverCidade – Centro Universitário da Cidade, and a curator, with Lia Rodrigues, of Festival Panorama RioArte de Dança. He is the author of *A Formação do Balé Brasileiro – Nacionalismo e Estilização*, by Editora FGV, and *Giselle: O Vôo Traduzido – da lenda ao balé*, by Editora UniverCidade.

Relâche: When did dance criticism start in Brazil?

Roberto Pereira: It's difficult to say when it started, but certainly the 20th century represented the construction of a dance tradition in the country, through the first official dance institute in the city of Rio de Janeiro, in 1927, and later with the creation of a company. The development of a public and of a specialized dance critic gains strength at this moment. We can mention Jacques Corseuil (1913–2000) as one of the best critics of his generation, although several others who often were music critics, had pursued this activity in Brazil. More names could certainly be mentioned. Nicanor Miranda in São Paulo, and later on, Suzana Braga and Antônio José Faro. It is obviously worth mentioning one of our most important critics today: Helena Katz, from *O Estado de São Paulo* newspaper.

R: In 2003 you published the book *A Formação do Balé Brasileiro – Nacionalismo e Estilização* [*The Brazilian Ballet Formation – Nationalism and Stylization*] through Editora FGV, in which you talked about the embryonic period of dance in our country. What did Getúlio Vargas' project for the “*abrasileiramento*” [Brazilianization – sic] of dance during the Estado Novo [New State] consist in?

Roberto: In fact, it entailed several actions together. In arts, in general, there was a contract, but in dance, besides the artistic aspect, there was the matter of the ‘body of the Brazilian’, that is, how to be committed to the crossing of races and make it a national pride. Delicate issues such as race and ethnic group became evident with greater strength and Brazil needed to find its own face. And it is at this moment, when the ballet arrives here, that one realizes the necessity of looking Brazilian. In my book, I

tried to point out how these adjustments happened.

R: What can you tell us about the historical significance of the ballet dancer Eros Volusia to Brazilian dance?

Roberto: Eros Volusia appears exactly in the context described above. She was a ballet dancer who had “the face” of a Brazil that one wanted to find. She was very beautiful, and above all, a “morena” [a brunette]. And she was the one who systematically wanted to create a “Brazilian dance”. Her project was to mix the classical ballet with the several national dances that she had researched *in loco*, as she claimed it.

Certainly there was a great deal of romanticism in this task, but it was through her that a lot of things started to be thought about this matter. It's worth remembering that she was contemporaneous with Mario de Andrade, who also spent a lot of time researching about dance and national music. I won a scholarship here in Rio to write her biography. It's ready, together with a CD-Rom with more than 300 photos, besides recent interviews—one that she gave to Rádio Nacional [the National Radio] in 1948—and also the scene where she appears in a Hollywood film. Unfortunately, she died this year on the first of January. She would be 90 next June. I think Brazil owns a tribute to this dancer, choreographer, and researcher.

R: In the workshop at Casa Hoffmann, you declared that the critic must “create a crisis in the reception automatisms”. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Roberto: The idea of crisis, to put in crisis are at the root of the word critic. When one promotes an action in the receiver of viewing the object through the critic's stance, one of the intentions should be this: to challenge automatisms in the perception and call some aspects of the work being presented to the attention, always with generosity and respect.

R: “Liking is cultural, dated, and committed”. With this statement you indicate that “the critic must constantly struggle to avoid personalism”. How do you keep the adequate distance in relation to the pieces that you see and write about?

Roberto: Certainly this is a constant exercise. We are always talking about a person who is placed in a determined context. As we know, our relationship with the environment we live in promotes cultural bonds that should



Eros Volusia, Doação LaBanca
Non-identified photographer / CEODC – Acervo FUNARTE

always be thought over. To criticize is always an exercise of generosity: for the artist, for the public, and above all, for the work. Trying to let the person live fully, discovering his/her reading potential is an obligation of the art critic.

R: What do you consider important in the development of a dance critic?

Roberto: First of all, to know dance, to study its history a lot and know how to appraise it in the history of arts and of culture. Another important requirement is not to be prejudiced, knowing how to differentiate styles, watching all the dance performances you can, without forgetting the other arts. And also, having a background in philosophy, aesthetics, and whatever is necessary for this critic to know his/her object.

R: How has dance criticism survived in Brazil? What can you say about the spaces for the dance critic in the Brazilian newspapers and magazines?

Roberto: I think it has improved a lot. In São Paulo we have Helena Katz and Inês Boga. Silvio Soter and I write in Rio, and in Belo Horizonte we have Marcelo Aguilar. Sure, we still are very few. I have taught some dance criticism courses in Brazil, forcing journalists and dance researchers to write in the paper, to produce criticism. Some new researchers have emerged, as Rosa Primo in Ceará and Airton Tomazoni in Rio Grande do Sul.

R: Who is the newspaper dance criticism for? What is the role of the dance critic in audience development?

Roberto: Criticism addresses the artist, the public, and the researcher. Criticism addresses history. It fulfills an important part in this process of audience development, for it can, without prejudice about being didactic, help the person in the audience to read what he/she is seeing, without, however, creating a unique reading model. It also represents a source of great value for the researchers because it represents a period, a context. The great critic

of French dance, the romantic poet Theophile Gautier, with his criticism filled with poetry, provided the world with the possibility of better understanding famous ballets such as *Giselle*, for example.

R: In the last years the amount of electronic magazines about dance has increased. Do you perceive this fact as a path to the maturing of a thought on dance related to the general audiences and readers or do these virtual spaces end up being restricted to the very same dance community?

Roberto: To create spaces for discussion about dance is still a challenge. But maybe the biggest challenge is to create spaces with discussions of quality that will prompt interest in people from other areas, too.

R: Recently you published the book *Giselle: O Vôo Traduzido – da lenda ao balé* [*Giselle: The Translated Flight – from the legend to ballet*], through Editora UniverCidade. Can you talk about this work and this choice?

Roberto: I have always been a romantic ballet lover. This work is my Master's dissertation that I developed in the University of Vienna, in Austria. It is a semiotic reading of how a legend was told in literature and in dance, in a kind of translation of media. The *Giselle* ballet appears here as this place of observation. I searched and brought together for the first time in a single work rare literary texts from that period.

R: You are a researcher in full activity in Brazil. You have signed several research works and publications, and among them are the biographies of Tatiana Leskova and of the Russian ballet dancer Juliana Yanakieva. How has producing dance theory been like in our country?

Roberto: It is a great pleasure to produce theory here. I have eight books on dance published, besides three editions of *Lições de Dança* [*Lessons of Dance*], an anthology with articles of several Brazilian and foreign researchers. Silvia Soter and I organized this material. Brazil needs more publishing, but even this market seems to be growing with the creation of new undergraduate programs that beg for specific bibliographies.

R: It seems you have a big interest in *Teatro de Revista* [vaudeville shows]. What is the importance of this art form in the history of Brazilian dance?

Roberto: My interest was linked to my thesis research, but I sure observe, there is a field still untouched to be explored by a researcher. Something has been produced about *Teatro de Revista* [vaudeville shows] in a general sense, but specifically about dance in it, nothing has been done yet. Even our *chanchadas* [Brazilian comedies], our musicals, are still waiting for someone to seriously pursue and study how that dance was made there. One of the important things about the vaudeville show for dance is that there, the dance that you did in the streets was allowed and could be contaminated with the other one, imported from Europe. So, the possibility of dancing in a different manner with another body was being created, almost creating a chronicle choreography of that historical context.

R: Together with Lia Rodrigues, you are the curator of Panorama. How did the project *Novíssimos* [The Newest] begin as part of the event?

Roberto: The Panorama, especially after 1996, became a greatly important dance festival, not only in Rio de Janeiro, but in the whole country of Brazil. It won a bigger theater and was able to bring dance companies at an absolutely accessible price, which allowed for the public to have contact with the most current dance produced elsewhere. With this preoccupation, one of its most important tasks, the one of opening opportunities for creative young people started to get lost, although this was exactly its first intention, when it still was a smaller festival, still being formed. So, Lia and I created this project, which was meant to rescue some of the importance of increasing creation in dance in the creative young people and interpreters. This project was extended, and we created the workshops of the *Novíssimos Curadores* [Newest Curators] and the *Novíssimos Críticos* [Newest Critics], which worked very well. It is a project I love to do. I believe in it.

R: You affirm the body is 100% committed to the culture. From this statement, what do you see of singular in contemporary Brazilian dance?

Roberto: This is a difficult question, which deserves to be thought of with caution. What surprises me is how we have the ability to create and produce facing all the difficulties we have in this country. So, it is clear that this creation and production ends up getting a new face, which many times is born with antibodies to mediocrity, which still insists on appearing not only in Brazilian

dance, but in the whole world. ♦

Roberto Pereira led a workshop at Casa Hoffmann – Centro de Estudos do Movimento in Curitiba, Brazil, September 25–28, 2003.

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