

## Dancing of the Streets, Stripped Down to Its Art

MONTCLAIR, N.J. — It's easy to imagine Sonia Destri rehearsing with Companhia Urbana de Dança, her all-male Brazilian troupe that specializes in contemporary dance and hip-hop. Or at least this is my fantasy: the moment just before a dancer is about to spin on his head or whip a leg around in a windmill, she hollers, "Freeze!"

**GIA  
KOURLAS**  
**DANCE  
REVIEW**

Last year Ms. Destri's company made its American debut at the Fall for Dance Festival, at City Center, to great acclaim, partly because her aesthetic was so out of the ordinary. She 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 fanfare of its practitioners — could enter into the realm of art.

Now the company is back, at least in the New York vicinity, courtesy of Peak Performances at the Alexander Kasser Theater, where it opened on Thursday night. (It's entirely worth the trip to Montclair State University.) Along with "Id:Entidades," the melancholy work seen previously at City Center, the program features "Chapa Quente," or "hot plate" in Portuguese. The slang phrase, which originated in the favelas, Rio de Janeiro's slums, can refer to an imminent confrontation or, perversely, to a party that is going strong. It's really about adrenaline.

If the still impressive "Id:Entidades" is about showing the

strength in sensuality, "Chapa Quente" finds the sensuality in strength. In it a dancer stands in profile before taking off in brisk, backward circles. Within this world is an exploration of how momentum can extend into many directions at once: as other dancers drop in and out of circular patterns, Ms. Destri's structure builds until, suddenly, they all race backward with ferocity, their bodies tilting precariously toward the center of the stage, as if they were in danger of falling. (They don't.)

Throughout "Chapa Quente" there is palpable tension in which the movement, with the forceful jut of a leg or an arm, becomes threatening, almost hinting that a fight is about to break out. Still, it remains silken; just when the aggression seems as if it might tip over the edge, the dancers turn their backs and shake their hips, giving in to — for just an instant, maybe two — the lively bounce of the samba.

While "Chapa Quente" is more robust than "Id:Entidades," it gives nothing away. The dancers, again, are remarkable — among them are Johnny Britto, who, with his mop of curls rising and falling, is rubbery, despite his bulk — but Tiago Sousa is the soul of "Chapa Quente." Wearing white, and with his smooth face inscrutable, Mr. Sousa pairs a serene upper body with the sharpest of feet.

Yet even though this is a company of soloists, both works exhibit an all-for-one mentality. Watching dancers hold onto their material too tightly is usually the uncomfortable norm, especially in hip-hop, but with Companhia Urbana de Dança, that's just not how it's done. I suppose the reason is Ms. Destri. The men can dance, but they are also lucky: she is their eye.

*Companhia Urbana de Dança performs through Sunday at Montclair State University, Alexander Kasser Theater, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, N.J.; (973) 655-5112 or peakperfs.org.*



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*Companhia Urbana de Dança performing "Chapa Quente" onstage at the Alexander Kasser Theater at Montclair State University.*