CONTRA
TIEMPO
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

CONTRA-TIEMPO is a Los Angeles based dance company founded and directed by Ana Maria Alvarez. The company is dedicated to transforming the world through dance. Their unique urban Latin dance theater work brings to life voices that are not traditionally heard on the concert stage. CONTRA-TEIMPO builds community, facilitates dialogue and moves youth to imagine what is possible in the world.

CONTRA-TIEMPO fuses Salsa, Afro-Cuban, and contemporary urban and abstract dance theater, to create an invigorating blend of physically intense and politically astute performance work. While their performances are consistently electrifying, what sets the company apart most is its unique relationship to its own community. CONTRA-TIEMPO is, much like the community it reaches, a tapestry. CONTRA-TIEMPO is an active and uncompromisingly radical take on ways in which artists function within communities. Its company members professional dancers, artists are immigrants, teachers activists organizers and movers of all types living and working in Los Angeles. Each company member lives, expresses, and struggles within the varied and infinitely complex political and personal landscapes that Alvarez seeks to address in her work.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR - ANA MARIA ALVAREZ

CONTRA TIEMPO

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After receiving a BA in Dance and Politics from Oberlin College, Alvarez moved to Brooklyn, NY where she became the Dance Specialist at The Center for Family Life's "Lifelines" Community Arts Project. There she taught, danced and choreographed for several years before moving to Los Angeles in 2002.

Alvarez received her MFA in Choreography from UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures. She continues to guest lecture and teach at local colleges and universities in California including El Camino College, Pepperdine, Cabrillo College and Cal State Los Angeles in addition to UCLA.

Alvarez has received numerous awards and recognition from the arts world and beyond, including LA Opinion's Mujeres Destacadas, Brooklyn Arts Exchange's Artist in Progress Award, Durfee Foundation ARC, Flourish Foundation, Puffin Foundation, Festival Internacional de Teatro de Los Angeles' (FITLA) and Instituto de Cultura de Puerto Rico, among others. She is a four time grant recipient from the Center for Creative Innovation, a four time grant recipient from the National Association for Latino Arts and Cultures, four time LA Department of Cultural Affairs Artist in Residence grantee and was awarded a grant from the NEA as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. In the last few years, Alvarez has been commissioned by Jamie Nichols' Celebrate Dance, St. Joseph's Ballet (now the Wooden Floor), CounterPULSE's Performing Diaspora Festival. Alvarez recently worked with Cornerstone Theater Company and Homeboy Industries, choreographing for "Cafe Vida", the first play in the company's five year Hunger Cycle. She was selected to represent Los Angeles Contemporary Dance at the Tanzmesse in 2012, in Dusseldorf Germany, and the following month was invited back to Germany to participate in a choreographers lab called "Kindling" (through IPAY).

She is currently developing a new body of work for CONTRA-TIEMPO, "Agua Furiosa" which explores race and water, and is receiving a New England Foundation for the Arts, National Dance Project grant for its' development and touring. "Agua Furiosa" will debut in 2015.

REPERTORY

FULL STILL HUNGRY - 2011

Full Still Hungry is a full-evening journey conceived and directed by Ana Maria Alvarez, set to an original score by composer, Cesar Alvarez. Performed by eight dancers, the evening which includes live music (6 all star musicians) aims to create an open and honest dialogue about how food, race, privilege, and cultural consumption and over-consumption impact our everyday lives. Artistic director Ana Maria Alvarez states, " Food is not just the material I put in my body to sustain life - but a web of relationships, histories, choices, decisions that all impact the world around us."

PLASTICO - 2008

Plastico is a comic and grotesque commentary on the 'Plastic' facade of Salsa. A dance form that started as a voice for regular people and an expression of history, power and opinions, has been transformed into a de-politicized, hyper-sexual exaggeration of the Latino body.

I DREAM AMERICA - 2007

I Dream America seeks to engage the tensions, commonalities, strains and histories between the Black and Latino communities. Traversing the political landscape of immigration and Hurricane Katrina, the piece investigates compassion and peace, and paints a disarming and thought-provoking critique of contemporary life and injustice.

AGAINST THE TIMES - 2005

Against the Times explores Salsa, an improvisational form born from the fusion of African and Spanish musical influences. Salsa was originally created as a cultural voice and form of expression for working class people, yet laden with social and political contradictions. In more recent times, the over sexualized representations of women have become more extreme, especially in styles that have been popularized by ballroom dancing and Hollywood films. The cast of CONTRA-TIEMPO will flip the script on who leads who. Together they will move resistance from being adversarial to being the fundamental key for communication and empowerment between partners and for a people.

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WORK IN DEVELOPMENT

CONTRA TIEMPO
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

AGUA FURIOSA

Artistic Director and Choreographer Ana Maria Alvarez will work in collaboration with a creative team including sound designer d. sabela grimes, master drummer Richie Marquez, lighting designer Masha Tsimring and director Michael Garces to create an evening length work loosely inspired by Shakespeare's The Tempest and the Afro Cuban deity of the wind and storms, Oya. Through call & response, improvisational scores, multiple water themes & personal narrative both Black & Latino, Agua Furiosa will invite audiences to face some of the gruesome contradictions of color, poverty & immigration in the US. The work aims to invent new paradigms for how we think about & live inside of this shifting conversation of race in America. Agua Furiosa has received a National Dance Project Grant. The piece will tour in the15/16 Season and is eligible for NDP touring support.

SHE WHO: FRIDA, MAMI & ME

Through generous support of the Princess Grace Foundation, Choreographer Marjani Forte will set an original new work on the company called SHE WHO: Frida, Mami & Me. This dynamic new work will traverse the intersecting narratives of Mami Wata and Frida Kahlo- provocateurs of the internal gaze. Dynamic, revolutionary figures of art, history, and mysticism that provoke our ideas of wommanness and power. Forte will connect with a set designer to recreate and reference the stunning biographical images of Frida Kahlo's paintings, while collaborating with composer Everett Saunders in an original score that intersects with Chavela Vargas' rendering of Paloma Negra. This work will be available in the Fall of 2015.

“represents the kind of socially aware contemporary work that only a few dance artists such as Bill T. Jones reliably provide...in heart, mind and soul this is the real thing! “
- Los Angeles Times
CONTRA TIEMPO
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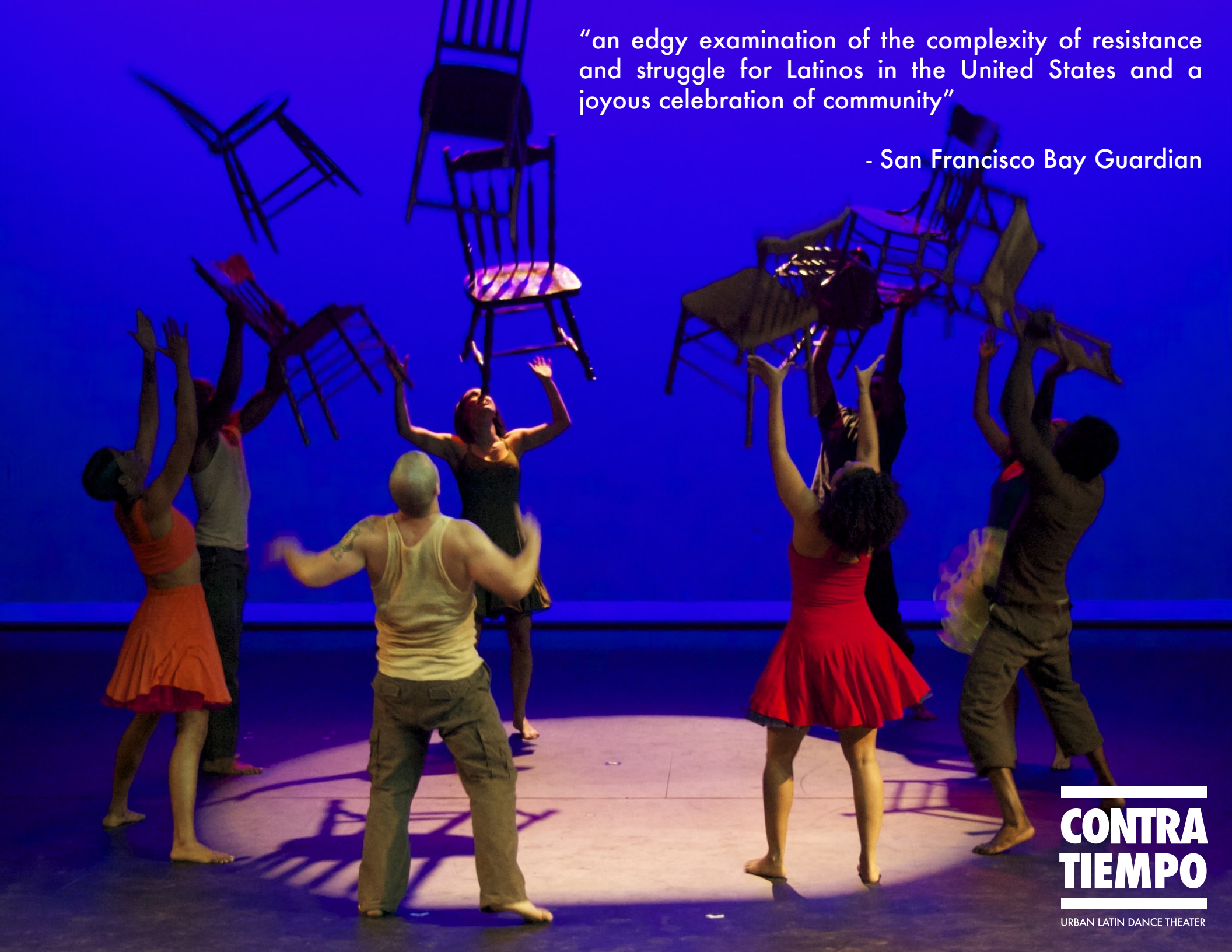

"an edgy examination of the complexity of resistance and struggle for Latinos in the United States and a joyous celebration of community"
- San Francisco Bay Guardian
CONTRA TIEMPO
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

"A passionately delivered performance communicates the often antagonistic relationships that exist among Latino immigrants to America, as well as the nature of the greater struggles that they face in the new country."

Katherine Paradero, The Worldly, LA, CA

CONTRA TIEMPO

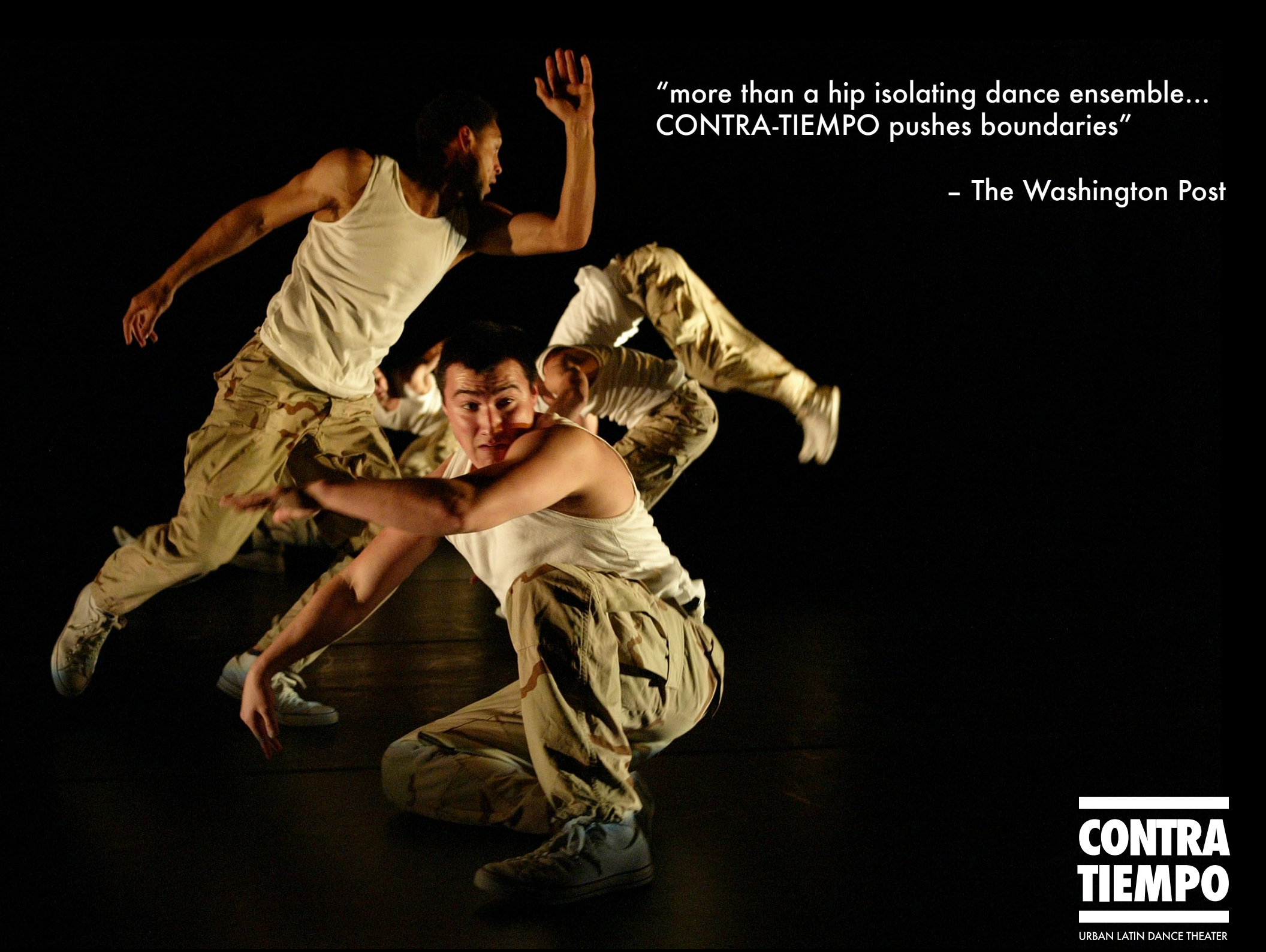
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

"L.A - based company CONTRA-TIEMPO is making waves with its bold approach to teaching and performance."

- Dance Teacher Magazine

CONTRA TIEMPO

URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER



"more than a hip isolating dance ensemble…
CONTRA-TIEMPO pushes boundaries"

– The Washington Post

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"A joyous performance... comically explores the diversity of Salsa dancing, while also using the dance form to portray the thorny social and political issues facing Latinos in America today!"

- BackStage, NYC

CONTRA TIEMPO

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"...a fresh-faced, talented dance company from Los Angeles. Fantastic dancing abounds in this piece."

- David Koteles, nyctheatre.com, NY, NY

CONTRA TIEMPO

URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

OPINION

Cochabamba, 15 de junio de 2014
Interviewing Ana María Álvarez, director of CONTRA-TIEMPO company
by IDA PEÑARANDA

"This world would be more compassionate if we lived in the same way in which we dance"

CONTRA-TIEMPO is a dance company based in Los Angeles (United States), dedicated to transform the world through dance. This year, our country has been included to their tour in South America, thanks to the United States Embassy and to the program of DanceMotion USASM, produced by the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), which its objective is to present the best American contemporary dance, and at the same time, facilitate cultural exchange. After visiting Santa Cruz, the company is now in Cochabamba conducting various workshops for free and for the public. Tomorrow, Monday, their tour in our city will come to end with three workshops (come see the program).
We spoke with Ana María Álvarez, director of the company, Cuban-American choreographer, who, in her thesis for her Masters, explored the abstraction of "latin dance", specifically in Salsa, as a way to express social resistance in the fight of immigration in the United States. The thesis was converted into a work called Contra-Tiempo/Against the Times, which was eventually the founding impulse for the company's name in 2005.

-CONTRA-TIEMPO is a company that groups dancers from different places, and it even works with different styles of dance (salsa, afro-cuban, hip-hop, theatre dance, urban and contemporary), How has this diversity enriched and/or conflicted with your work?

My work as a choreographer is a reflection of my life. I grew up in a multilingual world and my form as a dancer comes from different places. As a dancer and artist I am a manifestation or a result of these fusions. There could not be another form in which I could work because I am diversity. The dance company CONTRA-TIEMPO has the capacity to connect with other communities, because we speak various languages of dance (the different styles) and various languages within the dancers (English, Spanish, Portuguese), which helps us to connect with the audience.

-How do you think through dance, you can create social change?

For me, dance has the capacity to surpass stereotypes and preconceptions. Through our body movement we could get to know each other individually as people and like that we can get to understand each other as a community. For me, dance is a metaphor of how the world could work, since it connects us with another person in an authentic way.

For example, when you look at each other's eyes, when you use empathy when dancing, and/or when putting yourself in the place of the other person.

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The movement of one person affects the movement of the other person. In English we use the phrase "compassionate partnership", which means the relationship between the leader and the follower, a relationship of communication which implies to listen to one another. I believe that this world would be more passionate if we lived in the same way that we dance. The social change has to begin at an individual level, then in partnership, to then make an impact on the community.

-In your latest works, what issue has been addressed and what is the creative process?

In the last works we have explored themes of immigration, the connections and struggles of African-Americans and Latin-Americans in the United States, gender issues, exploring, inserting and changing the relationships and roles of men and women to disarm stereotypes. The most recent theme is about exploring the food and the communist culture. The food is a series of decisions, opinions, which reflects the excessive culture of communism of our times.

My creative process generally starts with an idea of a theme that I would like to explore: I look for music, sounds or poems and then I begin to improvise which is inspired by this idea. My process also is collaborative. I like to work with dancers who have different styles and give them the opportunity to improvise and bring their own way of moving. I feel as if I were mixing ideas, styles and perspectives in a salsa of many flavors.

-Why did you choose Bolivia, Chile, and Ecuador for your tour through South America? What significance has the tour had for the group?

The decision of which countries we would visit for this tour was made by the United States Embassy. Each country has its own personality and sharing our work in each country has been a different experience because it has been received differently. For us, it's incredible to be in so many places where we can learn more about the power of dance on how it connects different communities and shares the hope of the future through dance. As humans we learn to share our languages, the love for movement, and the liberty that we feel when we dance. There can be political tension between governments of different countries, but dance makes us all equal, there are no hierarchies and we all have something to share. Art has the ability to play complex social issues in a way which unites and does not divide.

-How do you see the movement of dance in Bolivia, Chile, and Ecuador?

We have had the chance to see folkloric dance, contemporary dance, and fusions. In Santa Cruz we saw a performance of Saya (Afro-Bolivian dance) and we have been able to share our movements with breakdancers. The part of sharing is an important moment in the workshops. In Ecuador and Chile we saw many indigenous dances mixed with contemporary techniques. We were working with professional groups and with dance schools. We have high expectations in experiencing the dance movements of Bolivia.

-This Monday the 16th, you will give a "Rueda" workshop in the city of Cochabamba. What is the dynamic and who can participate?

Rueda is a dance where you dance with a partner but in a big circle. Everyone can participate, people with experience or who never have danced. In English we say that rueda is an "equalizer", it's to say, this is a community dance where it does not matter what's your level, since the group supports beginners. We are going to learn many rueda steps, and at the end of the class, we are all going to dance complete ruedas.

THE NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

Boys Find A Place On The Stage

by Melissa Bailey | Jan 16, 2014 4:43 pm

CONTRA TIEMPO
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

On stage, Carlos Lopez stomped his feet and belted out, "Ha!" The triumphant declaration during a workshop on urban dance delighted his teacher—and left staff grappling with a question: How can middle schools do better at engaging boys? The question arose at Fair Haven School, where students got a special visit from CONTRA-TIEMPO, an urban Latin dance company from L.A. The visiting dancers worked with 65 Fair Haven School kids this week as part of a four-day tour through New Haven sponsored by Community Alliance for Research and Engagement, the city, and the Connecticut Mental Health Center Foundation.

As the kids stomped and clapped on the stage, Principal Margaret-Mary Gethings made an observation: Boys-even those who often have difficulty focusing in class-were completely on task. The visit highlighted a missing component at the K-8 neighborhood school in the heart of the city's Latino community: Fair Haven School has an after-school dance program, Ballet Haven, that has transformed the lives of middle-school girls. But the school doesn't have an equivalent program to keep boys hooked on school.

Boys across the country, in urban and suburban schools, are more likely than girls to be suspended, to be diagnosed with attention deficit disorders, to be held back, and to drop out, said author Peg Tyre, who wrote a best-selling book on the topic that ignited a national debate about how schools are failing boys. The educational outcomes for black and Latino boys are particularly bleak.

Boys at Fair Haven School play football, basketball and soccer. Some take music lessons. But they don't have a counterpart to Ballet Haven, through which teachers Mnikesa Whitaker and Monica Bunton help girls build a strong sense of identity, confidence, determination and discipline. "Ballet Haven has been so influential" for girls, Principal Gethings said. "We're looking to have some kind of vehicle for boys." The vehicle, she said, might resemble what happened on stage Tuesday morning.

Students filed into the school auditorium Tuesday in three shifts of 20 kids each. There, they met four energetic professional dancers, two men and two women. The dancers—Steve Flores, Jeremiah Buren, Isis Avalos and Maisha Morris—work with kids across the country, especially minority kids. They swung through New Haven between trips to New York and Pittsburgh.

Morris, the dance company's rehearsal director, said CONTRA-TIEMPO aims to give voice to "those who aren't traditionally heard on the stage." She led the students, who are mostly Latino, through a warmup, which involved asserting ownership over their own body parts through movement and phrases: "This is my head. It ain't your head."

The main lesson focused on step dancing. Stepping, she said, is about "who you are as an individual," expressing pride and confidence in yourself. Morris taught the group to stomp. And clap. Like they meant it. One move involved belting out an assertive "ha!" "Let all of it out," she instructed. "That's the beauty of dance and movement. If you don't have the words, let it out" through your body. "Don't worry about being quiet," she said, issuing an instruction not often heard at school. "Don't be quiet for the rest of your life. Make your voice known." The "ha"s—and accompanying giggles—echoed boldly in the school auditorium.

Students mastered the steps of a routine they had begun to learn on Monday. The routine ended in a powerful pose with two fists held tight in front of the chest. At the end of a final run-through with the 8th grade, one boy's voice rang out alone. "Ha!" called out Carlos Lopez (second from left in photo). His forceful exclamation drew giggles because it fell at the wrong moment in the routine. Morris took it as a welcome sign. "There it was!" she encouraged him. "You felt it."

THE NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

Boys Find A Place On The Stage

by Melissa Bailey | Jan 16, 2014 4:43 pm

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Carlos, who's 15, arrived at Fair Haven School less than a year ago from Mexico. This was his first time learning to step. "I felt the power I had inside," he said in Spanish. "It was a great experience."

In his group of about 20 8th-graders, Carlos was one of three boys. Fair Haven music teacher Dan Kinsman said he invited all 8th-graders to sign up for the class. Students secured a spot by taking home a permission slip and bringing it back with a signature—a requirement designed to demonstrate that the kids really wanted to be there.

Girls are much more likely to engage in extra-curricular activities at school, except for sports, according to author Tyre. "Opportunities to explore early leadership roles"—such as school plays, student council, and student newspaper—"are more in the female domain," she said. "Elementary and middle and high schools are very female-dominated places," she said. Not only are most teachers female, but schools value the types of behaviors girls tend to exhibit, she argued: Girls are often seen as "good at school" because they are more "compliant" and "follow the rules." Boys are "not that compliant, in the main."

Add to that educational disadvantages that start at an early age: "Boys begin school, from the very first days, behind girls, in literacy and pre-literacy experience. Little boys come into school speaking fewer words" than girls. Girls gain reading skills ahead of boys, and "those reading gaps grow almost every day" through high school and college, where girls are more likely to graduate.

Boys are four times more likely than girls to be identified as having learning disabilities and twice as likely to be held back in school, Tyre said. In middle school—boys are more likely to get Cs and Ds, while girls are more likely to get As and Bs. "Boys get the idea that school is a game that they can't win at, and they don't want to play," she said. "At a certain point boys wake up and realize that schools are female-dominated enterprises, and wonder where they fit in." That's especially tough in the middle-school years, where "there's a big quest for identity," she added.

Boys sometimes find that identity in sports. They do well in "things that are physical and about competition and hierarchy," which "provide a relief and counterpoint to the classroom," she observed. Boys relish a "high level of movement," Tyre said, but the most important thing isn't what the activity is—it's the role model in front of the kids. "If you have highly literate men who are leading boys in an activity," she said, "it's less about what you do. It's more about what who leads it."

Watching the six lessons over two days, Kinsman noticed that stepping was resonating not just with well-behaved kids like Carlos, but with boys who tend to act out. There were many more boys among the 6th- and 7th-graders who took the stage this week. Boys who have "frequent discipline problems" were "completely engaged and in leadership roles and really shining," Kinsman said. "After they had that class in the morning, they had really good days in the rest of their classes. They were focused and participating," he said. "Seeing that change for these boys that struggle in school," he said, "I'm definitely interested in how to continue that—to give them a reason to come to school, something to be excited about."

CONTRA-TIEMPO is wrapping up its four-day residency with a free performance of the company's hour-long work, FULL STILL HUNGRY, Thursday, Jan. 16 at 7:30 p.m. at Fair Haven School at 164 Grand Ave. A pre-show conversation with artistic director Ana Maria Alvarez, "Why Dance About Food?", starts at 6:45 p.m.

THE POLY POST

Performance Review: February 8th 2011
Dancing against the beat
Erin O'Brien - Correspondent
...continued

period. Members of the audience were able to ask about the dancer's rich histories and the different pieces. One student expressed her gratitude to the performers during the question and answer time.""I would just like to say thank you," said the student. "It's very exciting and exuberating and it's just been a very wonderful experience to be here and see you all."

CONTRA-TIEMPO has traveled to 26 K-12 schools teaching dance. Members hope to uplift the students' attitudes, spark social change and create dialogue between different groups. "I thought they would be a great group to present to CPP," said Gilbert R. Cadena, director of the Center for Community Service Learning. "[CONTRA-TIEMPO is] a group the not only dances creatively, but they work in the schools. What we want to do is bring people who are good examples that show how they could get involved in the local community, and we thing what they're doing in these K-12 schools is great."

CPP housed the company for a three-day residency, which started Wednesday and ended Friday. The residency consisted of the performance, lectures and student workshops, in collaboration with the Center for Community Service Learning and the Institute for New Dance and Cultures. "Faculty and students have been planning this even since the end of last quarter," said Abelardo Hernandez, a third-year computer engineering student with a dance minor. Members of CONTRA-TIEMPO were glad to share their talents. "It's really exciting for us to be able to perform for those who are studying the theories behind what we're really talking about on stage," said Alvarez, speaking to the dance students. "You guys get what we're doing at a whole different level." Faculty from the Institute of New Dance and Cultures were grateful to have CONTRA-TIEMPO perform and interact with students and faculty at CPP. "It was really important for me for the students to have an experiential and to show then CONTRA-TIEMPO," stated Gayle Fekete, department chair of the Institute of New Dance and Cultures. "It's modern, it's political, it has a message, it's fun, it's entertaining [and] you can get deep on it when you think about it."

THE POLY POST

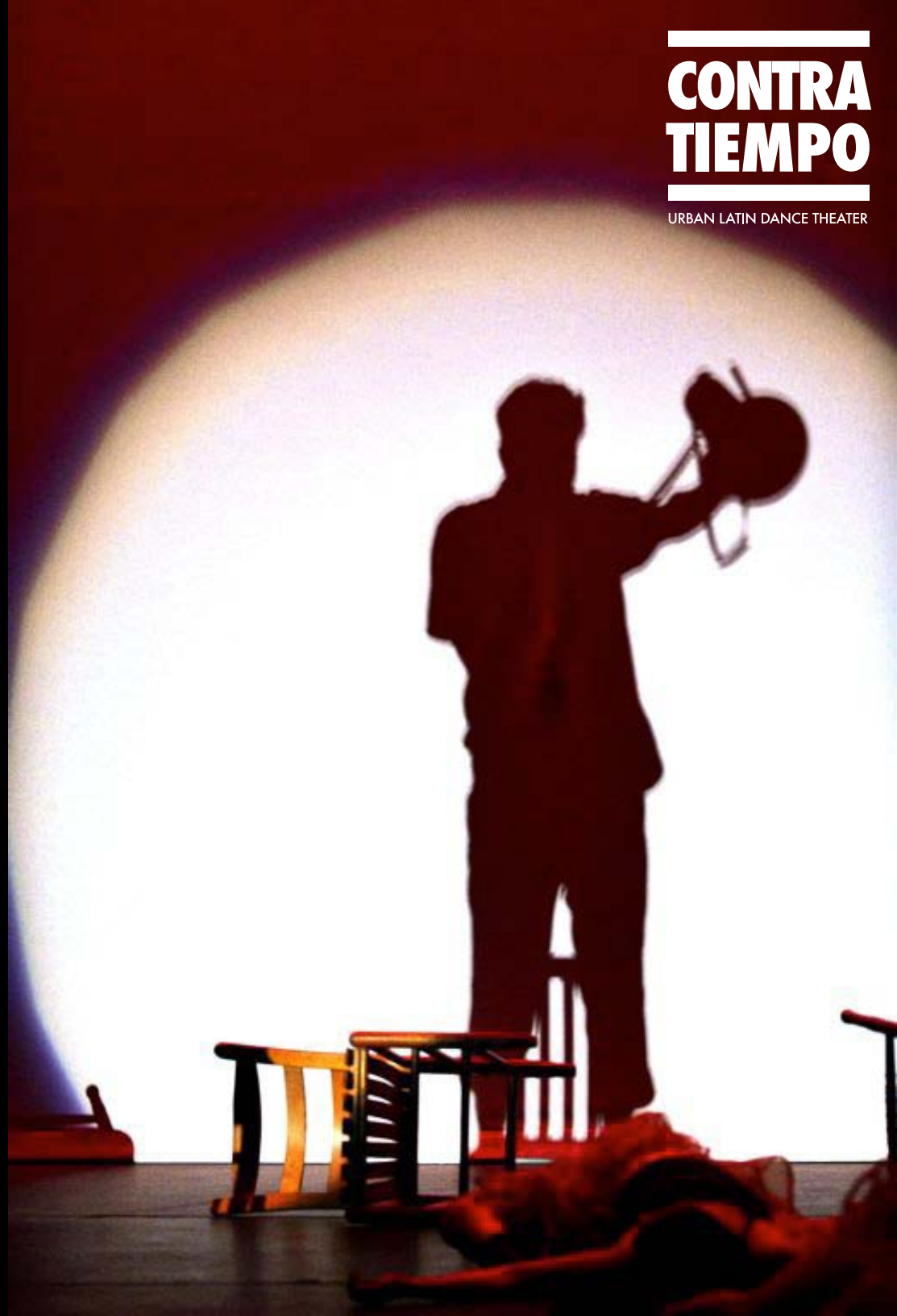
Performance Review: February 8th 2011
Dancing against the beat
Erin O'Brien - Correspondent
Los Angeles-based, non-profit dance company CONTRA-TIEMPO performed to an enthusiastic audience at Cal Poly Pomona's University Theater last Thursday

Surprises can be a good thing, and that certainly is that case in the ever-evolving world of CONTRA-TIEMPO. Audience member learned how community and dance can be fused while watching and participating in the performance of CONTRA-TIEMPO, a non-profit dance company that performed last Thursday at the University Theater. The theater had about 500 excited audience members, some of whom were Cal Poly Pomona dance students who came to watch their own teacher, Cesar Garfiaz, perform on stage. Garfiaz has been a part of the company since its start in 2005 and helped to found CONTRA-TIEMPO with Director Ana Maria Alvarez.

Alvarez and her non-profit, activist-based company of 11 dancers, blended together a wide array of dance forms and styles including Salsa, Afro-Cuban, West African and hip hop. They dub their brand of dance Urban Latin Dance Theater. The performers seek to bring about change of the ways people think of dance, Latin American culture, and community as a whole – a reference to the dance company's name, CONTRA-TIEMPO. "[CONTRA-TIEMPO] is Spanish for against time'" said Alvarez. "But it also means the off beat so I always think that we're expressing that we're dancing against the times."

A piece that seemed to be an audience favorite, Plastico, was a parody of salsa dance. The piece represented how the expressiveness of Salsa has been reduced to formulaic steps and moves. To emphasize this the performers put on exaggerated smiles as they danced. Then the music grew faster and dancers began to look mechanical, like puppets without any strings. Bianca Blanco, the company's newest member, said Plastico is her favorite piece because she is able to relate to its comic commentary on the rich history of Salsa. "It's just so over the top and ridiculous," said Blanco. "It's so freeing to do this over the top character. [It] is so fun because I just love to perform, so this pulls out the ham all the way." The audience laughed at the end of the piece when dancers formed a conga line that broke when the dancers fought for center stage.

The diverse company does more than just dance and perform; it incorporates community within its dance through audience participation. After taking their final bows, the dancers returned to invite willing audience members to learn Salsa with them for a few minutes on stage, followed by a question and answer



CONTRA TIEMPO

URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

EL LLANQUIHUE

North American dance company will conduct workshops for children of the region

June 5, 2014

María Consuelo Ulloa M.
mulloam@diariollanquihue.cl

As usual, Teatro del Lago offers a new EduVida, which in this opportunity it will count with the participation of the cast, dancers and choreographers, of the North American dance company CONTRA-TIEMPO, belonging to the Dance Motion program of Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) of New York.

The group will arrive this Friday June 6th to Frutillar, where they will conduct activities at 12 and 15 hours to more than 500 schoolchildren in the region.

This encounter will allow students to get closer to this discipline and know more about it, through an interactive show, where the company will show the whole choreographic and dance tradition of this academy (Teatro del Lago), which during more than 150 years it has been the niche of innovative modern masters and emerging artist.

Meanwhile, on Saturday June 7th, the company will offer dance workshops throughout the day, to approximately 100 students training ballet in the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) of the Escuela de las Artes-Casa Richter and the program ¡Puedes Bailar! (You can Dance!) of Teatro de Lago.

DANCE TRAJECTORY

CONTRA-TIEMPO, defined as an Urban Latin Dance Theatre Company, was founded in 2005 by the Cuba-American choreographer Ana María Álavarez, and has accomplished various performances throughout the United States, as well as international tours to Cuba.

Their style fuses rhythms like Salsa, Afro-Cuban, Hip-Hop, and dance-theater, with a unique feature to attract the public, overcoming social and cultural gaps.

For its part, DanceMotion is a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State of the United States, produce by BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music) to bring the best of American contemporary dance abroad and facilitate the artistic exchange between the inhabitants of different communities worldwide.

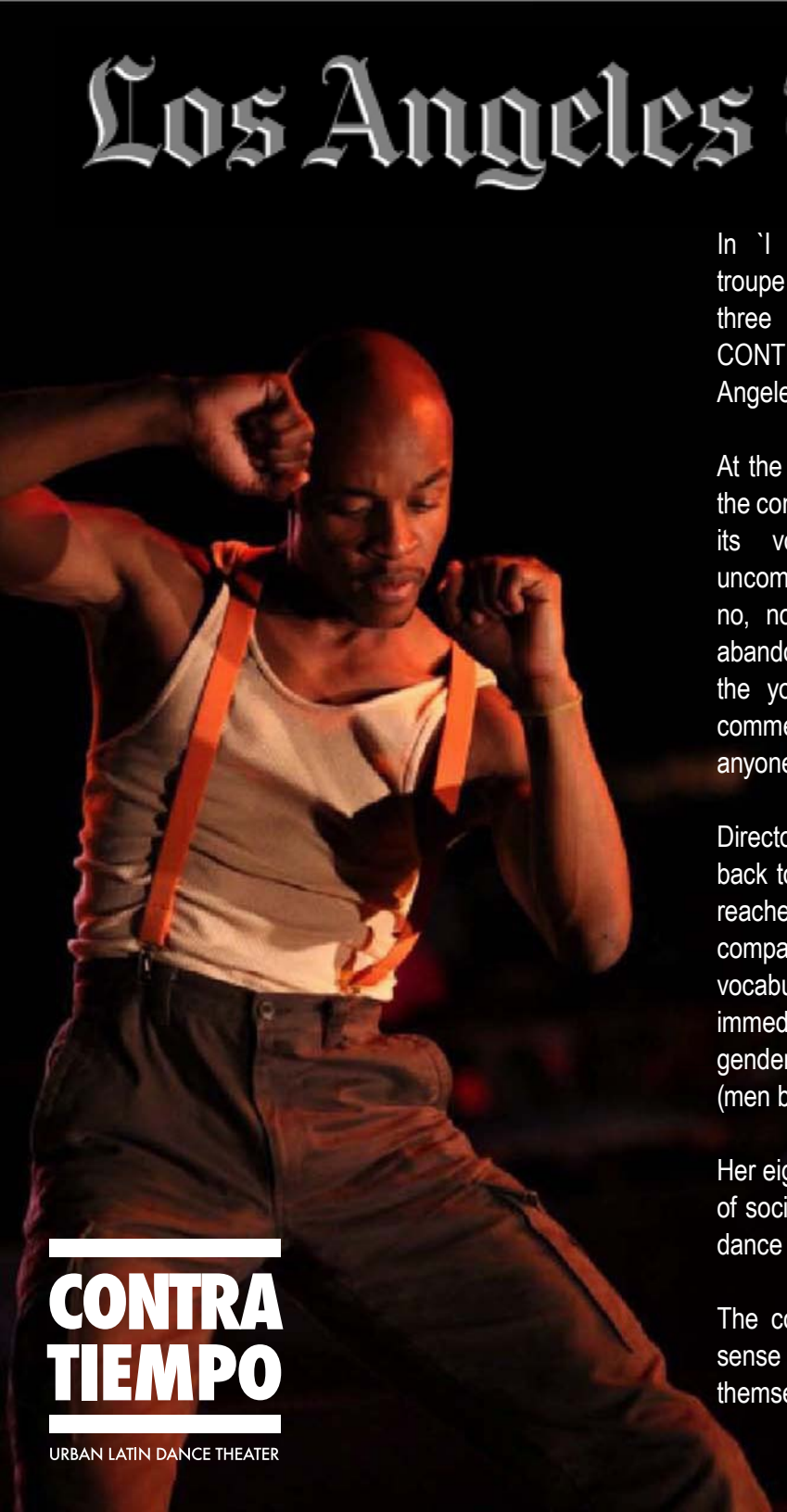
EDUVIDA FOR KIDS

EduVida is an educational program created by Teatro del Lago which allows students to participate for free in a concert or a performance of dance, music, theater or opera, interactively. Thus, the event is geared towards students in 3rd and 4th grades on Friday, and 1st and 2nd grades on Saturday.

Los Angeles Times

Seeing a New U.S. Ideal

DANCE REVIEW - July 07, 2007 - Lewis Segal



In `I Dream America,' L.A.'s CONTRA-TIEMPO troupe shows its daring, socially aware agility.Formed three years ago, the 11-member company called CONTRA-TIEMPO just might be the new face of Los Angeles dance -- and the new voice as well.

At the Unknown Theater in Hollywood on Thursday, the company's face was mostly brown, beige or black, its voice bilingual or accented, its vision uncompromisingly identified with the underclass. And no, not only the Latino underclass but also the abandoned, forgotten victims of Hurricane Katrina, the youth culture betrayed and exploited by the commercial swill that currently passes for hip-hop -- anyone in danger of marginalization.

Director-choreographer Ana Maria Alvarez has gone back to where theatrical dance always goes when it reaches a dead end -- to folklore -- and built her company style on the rhythms and push-pull vocabulary of salsa. This choice gives her work an immediate accessibility, though her exploration of gender issues often results in unorthodox partnering (men being dipped, for instance) and same-sex duets.

Her eight-part "I Dream America" represents the kind of socially aware contemporary work that only a few dance artists such as Bill T. Jones reliably provide.

The company is strong, the opinions stronger, the sense of people dancing against injustice or taking on themselves the pain of the oppressed like nothing else in local dance. The protest is always pithy, but the most powerful moments come when the statements of mutual support and solidarity suggest that Alvarez sees CONTRA-TIEMPO as a microcosm of a reconceived U.S.A. -- a supportive community, responsible and caring.

Clearly Alvarez will try anything, for the program includes bad ideas that show you how she got to the good ones. A brief flirtation duet, for example, plays like a Moiseyev relic: folkloric steps placed in a much-too-cute quasi-narrative context. Other sequences look like basic classroom exercises about getting a text up on its feet. There are impossibly overloaded pileups of speech, music, video and dance. Even some of the same-sex duets look more like political statements than fully developed choreography.

The extended "contra-tiempo/against-the-times" suite starts as a comic depiction of a salsa class (with the unspoken thoughts of the participants played over loudspeakers), then peaks and sags a number of times before its audience-participation finale. The core of it -- varied, overlapping salsa duets that never lose their dignity even at highest velocity and intricacy -- easily outweigh the lumpy, agitprop insertions, but well-structured it's not. No matter. In heart, mind and soul, this is the real thing, on its way to distinction even if not always there yet. And the live music (much of it composed by Cesar Alvarez) adds its own potent excitement. lewis.segal@latimes.com

THE OBERLIN REVIEW

Dancing Community: The Dance of Social Resistance

By Kara Brooks
Sept. 30, 2011

In celebration of Latino/a Heritage Month at Oberlin College, Ana María Alvarez, OC '99, came to Oberlin this past Tuesday to provide a public lecture, as well as instruct two master dance classes. After studying at the North Carolina School of the Arts and training with the Urban Bush Women, Alvarez, a Cuban-American choreographer, created CONTRA-TIEMPO, a dance program at University of California Los Angeles Lab School, which is now the focus of her work.

CONTRA-TIEMPO serves not only as an arts education program, but also as a dance company suitable for concert stage. "We struggle with communicating to people that we do both and that we do both well," Alvarez said.

Activist performance work is a key element of the liveliness of CONTRA-TIEMPO. Alvarez calls herself a "dance activist" and explains that a great deal of her job is to re-teach people about different forms of dance, such as salsa, among others.

Alvarez stressed the vital give and take between the education program and the dance company. One student assignment is to attend a concert stage performance and to respond, through dance, with an interpretation of the pieces they saw. The students receive encouragement and a tangible grasp of what level of skill they could one day reach.

The CONTRA-TIEMPO dance company is informed by its students as well. Alvarez related the story of a poem written by a girl in sixth grade and how it inspired a piece on black and Latino/a unification. The assignment was to respond to the Langston Hughes poem, "Let America Be America Again," and the student integrated her family's personal experience of immigration to the U.S. into the format of the Hughes poem. Alvarez described the raw power of the girl's piece, which remains one of CONTRA-TIEMPO's most popular and has particular resonance in its home base of L.A.

Alvarez played a clip from Dancing With the Stars to illustrate how severe the misconceptions of salsa dance have become: When we think of salsa, she pointed out, we think of sex. She emphasized how this perception the media promotes is a "dumbing down of a culture" and allows no room for political or social discourse.

In their efforts to reshape these social misconceptions, CONTRA-TIEMPO teaches proper salsa dance. The main element that must exist between two salsa partners is "resistance." As Alvarez described, one must push up against one's partner, creating a new experience each time. One particular partner experience could be sexually driven; however, this should not be the expectation. Salsa is a dance form that occurs between family members; it is a celebratory dance and is meant to create a connection. You just listen to your partner, and, in fact, much of the dance is improvised. You don't always have to follow the choreography; you shouldn't blindly follow the steps.

"[Salsa] is fundamental and a metaphor for our society," Alvarez explained. "Our resistance gives us all a voice." Her message resonated: If we are not against an issue, it is almost as if we are a part of it.

HOY LOS ANGELES

Culture, Dance, and Food
By: Andrea Carrión
September 23, 2011

Work Created by Latinos Looks to Bring Consciousness about Nutrition through Dance and Music

CONTRA TIEMPO
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

Some time ago, Ana Maria Alvarez learned that eating was not the mere action of chewing and swallowing. After an incident with her own health, the U.S. born artist with Cuban roots delved into as much information as she could find about food and the ways in which different cultures nourish themselves. She was so fascinated with what she discovered that she decided to share it with the whole world through what she knows best: dancing.

Her brother Cesar was quickly infected with the idea and, using his talents with instruments, like the sax and the cuatro, and singing, created the musical score for this production titled "Full Still Hungry."

The work, whose only presentation will be tonight, will include fifteen dancers and three acts, and will narrate the ways in which people of different cultures interact with the world and their food consumption.

"Its a discussion about cultures, family, about the connection with our roots, about how we define ourselves as human beings and how we interact amongst ourselves," explains Ana Maria, age 34.

"We live surrounded by food," adds Cesar, "it's on billboards on the street, in the glove compartment, in the grocery store, on T.V., in the magazines, all over the place...We can fill ourselves with food, but ultimately we are also talking about all that is missing when that happens." For these siblings, born of a Cuban father and an American Mom, both union activists, the mission of this work is to create consciousness and reflect on the conflicts and nutritional challenges we deal with daily, but in an entertaining way. Their angle is very social and very political, and it's always been like that.

Since the creation of the company, CONTRA-TIEMPO, Ana Maria has dedicated herself to producing work that entertains and at the same time makes her audience reflect upon something. In 2005, she debuted with "Contra-Tiempo," a production that speaks about immigration and uses salsa as a metaphor for defending your ideals and participating in society. Two years later, she created "I Dream America" also about the issue of immigration. Then, came two smaller productions. But "Full Still Hungry" is the most ambitious work attempted and will have live music for the first time. This dance company, made up of African-Americans and Latinos, with acts that include all genres of dance like Capoeira, Afro-Cuban, African, Afro-Brazilian, Modern, Tango, Stepping and Salsa as a shared form, doesn't limit itself to just small presentations at the national level. Both Ana Maria and Cesar say they are committed to creating community and wish to fill the void left by hundreds of arts education programs victim to budget cuts.

It's with this in mind that they created the Contra-Tiempo Futuro Company, which holds an intensive for pre-professional teens who are passionate about dance. They also offer workshops in elementary and middle schools. Between 2010 and 2011 they collaborated with 25 schools in Los Angeles.

"We use Salsa to think about community, to create alliances, relationships, it's a away to teach students how to think about more than just individuals and see themselves as a part of a community," comments Ana Maria.

"In the process, we have noticed that although Salsa is more rooted in Cuban and Puerto-Rican culture, just the same, it is a dance form that is all over Latin America. It serves as a tool to communicate with parents and better learn their history. Some students feel embarrassed to speak Spanish when in school and then they witness all of us speaking in Spanish and they feel proud of themselves because we all speak Spanish."

STARNEWS ONLINE

Dance Show Reflects Contra-tiempo's Work In Community

By Bob Workmon - StarNews Correspondent

Published: Tuesday, September 28, 2010

CONTRA-TIEMPO Urban Latin Dance Theater celebrates its Wilmington residency Saturday night with a final concert at UNCW's Kenan Auditorium. The performance will reflect every facet of the company's work, including its whole-hearted connection to the community through education. CONTRA-TIEMPO will perform three dances from the company's current repertoire as well as a new piece choreographed to include 21 students from New Hanover County's Bradley Creek Elementary School. "I Dream America" is the biggest work the company will perform. It takes on an equally big subject – that of the immigrant experience in this country, primarily through the prism of tensions and commonalities between Latinos and blacks in America. Ana Maria Alvarez, CONTRA-TIEMPO's artistic director, said that "I Dream America" blends two poems, one of them famous, the other written by a child. Twelve-year-old Melissa Ortiz, who took part in one of CONTRA-TIEMPO's previous residencies, wrote "I Dream America" in her mother's voice, said Alavarez, telling the story of how she left Guatemala for a life in America. Ortiz was inspired also by Langston Hughes' poem "A Dream Deferred," interspersing lines from Hughes' poem throughout her own, "so its's really a juxtaposition of the immigrant and the African-American experience," Alvarez said.

Also on the program is "Plastico," a dance that pokes fun and shakes a finger at what Alvarez described as the "grotesque, over-indulgent, vulgar, hyper-sexualized" salsa taught in ballroom classes and portrayed in Hollywood films, which bears little resemblance to authentic salsa. "It's our making fun of how contrived salsa has become," Alvarez said. Cesar Garfiaz, a CONTRA-TIEMPO founding member and Alvarez's teaching partner, said that "Plastico" also "goes beyond the obvious to reveal the materialism and recklessness

CONTRA-TIEMPO will perform three dances from the company's current repertoire in their final Wilmington concert as well as a new piece choreographed to include 21 students from New Hanover County's Bradley Creek Elementary School. Photo courtesy of UNCW going on underneath, especially with respect to the environment." The Bradley Creek students will join the professional dancers on stage for a work titled "Muchos Somos" (We Are Many) based on the movements they learned during the company's residency. "Muchos Somos" incorporates a poem, read by the students, written by all 21 children in the ensemble.

The concert will close with he company's signature piece, a work that encapsulates CONTRA-TIEMPO, meaning "against time." "Against the Times" comes from an idea Alvarez choreographed her MFA thesis at UCLA around, an idea from which the company was born. "It's about salsa as a metaphor for standing up for your ideals," she said. "It's about issues of border crossing – not necessarily borders of countries, but borders that hold you back in your life."

EDUCATION

SCHOOL PERFORMANCES

CONTRA-TIEMPO's performances allow students to experience engaging, dynamic and high-quality professional dance that is relevant to their lives. The company's performances for youth audiences run approximately 45 minutes, and address a range of themes, including African-American and Latino relations, food justice, immigration and gender role negotiation. The performances begin with the company members introducing themselves and themes of the work by way of interactive conversations and call and response activities with the students. After performing the work, the company always allows time for a Q&A and encourages students to connect to and reflect on what they saw
onstage.

SCHOOL RESIDENCIES & WORKSHOPS

CONTRA-TIEMPO's school residencies, short-term and long-term, share the joy of dance with students and inspire them to find their own creative voices. The company's residency themes reflect the eclectic and interdisciplinary nature of their work, consisting of Rueda Salsa andStepping as Community-Building, Urban Latin Dance Fusion, Dance & Health, and Poetry & Creative Dance curriculum. All of CON-TRATIEMPO's school residencies provide cultural and historical context of the dances, emphasize self-expression and community-building through the dance form, and prioritize the classroom as a space for empowerment, rather than competition, for students.

CONTRA TIEMPO

URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

EDUCATION

URBAN LATIN DANCE: CONTRA-TIEMPO TECHNIQUE CLASS

In CONTRA-TIEMPO's choreographic work, the company uses a unique blend of Salsa, Afro-Cuban, Hip Hop and contemporary technique and dance fundamentals. Master classes use the unique style of fusing forms to move dancers through an exploration of their bodies as creative, conscious and connected movers. They begin with a warm up in the center, moving in and out of the floor. Undulations, body rolls, footwork patterns and hip isolations will all be a part of this center floor work. Students will then work on traveling and taking this new found way of moving through the space, devouring the space, owning the 'stage', having their 'voice' be heard as a dancer. The class will end by teaching a small section of a new piece of company repertoire.
I think that's it.

SALSA LECTURES

CONTRA-TIEMPO's Founding Artistic Director, Ana Maria Alvarez, is a Cuban-American dancer and choreographer who has studied the history and culture of Salsa dance in both practice-based and academic settings. In her lectures, Alvarez pulls from her extensive research to frame Salsa as a contemporary cultural dance form. By referencing and deconstructing the history and technique of Salsa, Alvarez's lectures speak to larger ideas of community-building, social resistance, and the politics of dance.

CONTRA TIEMPO

URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

EDUCATION

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS & ENGAGEMENT

CONTRA-TIEMPO caters their community workshops to the unique needs and interests of each community they work with. Pulling from the culturally rich movement languages of Urban Latin Dance Fusion, like Salsa, Afro-Cuban and Stepping, CONTRA-TIEMPO's workshops engage community members in ideas of community-building and self-expression. The company's most recognized and celebrated workshop, that of Rueda (Cuban Salsa), teaches with high energy and joy the principles of leading and following through a lens of 'compassionate partnering'.

LECTURE DEMONSTRATIONS

CONTRA-TIEMPO's veteran company members are renowned and experienced artists capable of speaking to a variety of different academic audiences about the powerful work of the company. At CONTRA-TIEMPO's Lecture Demonstrations, company members speak with nuance and openness about the creative process and strategies behind the company's pioneering performances and community engagement. After the lecture, CONTRA-TIEMPO presents performance excerpts and invites the audience to participate in a hands-on workshop for them to experience on all levels the range and power of the company's work.

PAST PERFORMANCES BY THE COMPANY

2015
St. Mark's Church at the Bowery – New York, NY
The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts – Miami, FL
Riverdale Country School – Bronx, NY
University of Southern California – Visions and Voices – Los Angeles, CA
Ordway Performing Arts Center – St. Paul, MN
Orange City Arts Council – Orange City, IA
Peace Center for the Performing Arts - Greenville, SC
Royce Hall, UCLA - Los Angeles, CA

2014
St. Mark's Church at the Bowery – New York, NY
Taos Center for the Arts - Taos, NM
National Hispanic Center - Albuquerque, NM
NC A&T University, Lyceum Series - Greensboro, NC
Teatro Sucre – Quito, Ecuador
El Centro Civico – Guayaquil, Ecuador
Centro Boliviano Americano – Santa Cruz, Bolivia
Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral(GAM)– Santiago de Chile
Teatro del Lago – Frutillar, Chile
Skirball Cultural Center - Los Angeles, CA

2013
Modlin Center for the arts – Richmond, VA
Dance New Amsterdam – NYC
Carpenter Center for the Arts – Long Beach, CA
Grand Performances - Los Angeles, CA
Skirball Cultural Center - Los Angeles, CA
The Capshaw-Speilberg Center for the Arts – Santa Monica, CA
Kenan Hall – University of North Carolina in Wilmington
Arts Bank Theater – Philadelphia, PA
Royce Hall, UCLA - Los Angeles, CA

2012
APAP showcase at the Ailey Citigroup Theatre - New York, NY
Arizona State University – Tempe, AZ
Myrna Loy Center for the Arts – Helena, MT
Mesa Performing Arts Center – Mesa, AZ
Ford Amphitheatre – Los Angeles, CA

2011
Royce Hall, UCLA - Los Angeles, CA
Cal Poly Pomona University Theater - Pomona, CA
The Broad Stage - Santa Monica, CA
Zipper Concert Hall - Los Angeles, CA
Pasadena Civic Auditorium – Pasadena, CA
Ford Amphitheater – Los Angeles, CA

2010
Queens Theater in the Park – Queens, NY
APAP showcase at the Ailey Citigroup Theatre - New York, NY
Los Angeles Theatre Center - Los Angeles, CA
University of North Carolina Wilmington - Wilmington, NC
Royce Hall, UCLA - Los Angeles, CA
Pitzer College – Claremont, CA
Ordway Center for the Performing Arts – Saint Paul, MN

2009
Teatro Favorito - Centro La Habana, Cuba
Teatro de Cutumba - Santiago de Cuba
Skirball Cultural Center - Los Angeles, CA
Jacob's Pillow (Inside Out Festival) - Becket, MA
Lincoln Center Out of Doors– New York, NY
REDCAT, Walt Disney Concert Hall – Los Angeles, CA
Royce Hall, UCLA - Los Angeles, CA
CounterPULSE - San Francisco, CA
Arizona State University – Tempe, AZ

2008
Dance Place - Washington DC
New Dance at Saint Joseph Ballet - Santa Ana, CA
Alex Theater - Glendale, CA
The Arts Brewery - Seattle, CA
The Warner Grand Theater - San Pedro - CA
Skirball Cultural Center - Los Angeles, CA
El Teatro Favorito - La Habana, Cuba
Sabado Rumba con Conjunto Foklorico - La Habana, Cuba
El Teatro de Cutumba - Santiago de Cuba
The Ailey Citigroup Theatre - New York,NY

2007
Highways Performance Space and Gallery - Santa Monica, CA
REDCAT: Walt Disney Concert Hall - Los Angeles, CA
The Alex Theater - Glendale, CA
The Unknown Theatre – Hollywood, CA
The Beacon Hill Arts Center - Decatur, GA
University of North Carolina in Greensboro – Greensboro, NC
The Carolina Theater - Greensboro, NC
UCLA Kaufman Hall Garden Theater – Los Angeles, CA
Teatro Francisco Arrivi – San Juan, Puerto Rico

2006
REDCAT: Walt Disney Concert Hall –Los Angeles, CA
Freud Playhouse, UCLA – Los Angeles, CA
2006 Annual West Coast Salsa Congress - Los Angeles, CA
10th Annual NYC International Fringe Festival - New York, NY
Dance New Amsterdam (DNA) – New York, NY
Highways Performance Space - Santa Monica, CA
Festival Internacional de Teatro en Los Angeles (Tecate & Mexicali, MEXICO)

CONTRA TIEMPO
URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER

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