

**Program Strands:**

- Professional Development for Educators
- Written Performance Guide
- Classroom Extension Activities
- Artist Residency
- Live Performance for Students



**CONTRA-TIEMPO**  
**Urban Latin Dance Theater**

## Cultural Influences

CONTRA-TIEMPO is an internationally acclaimed Urban Latin Dance Theater company from Los Angeles, CA. Their performance draws on traditional Cuban dance forms, such as *Salsa*, *Son* and *Rumba* and fuses these forms with hip hop and contemporary dance. Rooted in the African *Diaspora*, the performance will begin with a call and response where students will learn the *clave*. The *clave* is the basic rhythm of *Salsa*, the heartbeat. This performance is appropriate for students for many reasons.

1) American culture is strongly influenced by the diversity of its citizens, and founded on the principal of freedom of expression.

2) People from all over the world have immigrated to the United States, bringing influences from their native lands. The immigrant experience is an American experience.

3) The choreography and music of CONTRA-TIEMPO reflects the diversity of the United States, fusing Latino, African American and European cultural influences.

4) *Salsa* is a music and dance form rooted in these African and European cultural influences

5) Dance is an art form that can tell stories and communicate strong ideas and opinions. Choreography can be a way to take a stand and make a difference by influencing the ways we think.

As you read through the materials provided, you will find information to help introduce the performance to your students, as well as classroom extension activities that will help make this performance a valuable learning opportunity.



CONTRA-TIEMPO: CULTURAL INFLUENCES  
LATIN AMERICA & THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

There are three different types of Afro-Cuban Rumba. The kind you will see in the show is called GUAGUANCO. It is danced between a man and a woman. The dancers are imitating the movements of a hen and a rooster.

## CONTRA-TIEMPO

CONTRA-TIEMPO is a dance company from Los Angeles, CA. CONTRA-TIEMPO includes nine dancers and a choreographer named Ana Maria Alvarez. Alvarez created the company because she wanted to explore the history and culture of Latinos and people of color in the United States. Alvarez believes that through dance, we can learn to respect others and build stronger and more caring communities.

CONTRA-TIEMPO's work is influenced by many different styles of dance from all over the world including:

**Salsa:** A style of dance rooted in Cuba that can be danced solo, with a partner, in a line or in a circle.

**Afro-Cuban:** Many slaves in Cuba were originally from Nigeria or the Congo and there are strong musical and dance ties to these regions of Africa on the island of Cuba.

**Hip-Hop:** A cultural form of music, dance and self expression born in the South Bronx, of New York City. The cultural form includes: graffiti art, DJ-ing (with records and sounds), MC-ing (rhyming and rapping) and breaking (dancing).

**Ana Maria Alvarez:** Choreographer Ana Maria Alvarez was born in Greensboro, NC and began dancing ballet when she was 5. As a child, she was influenced by the traditional dances of her Cuban family. She learned to dance Salsa from her Grandfather. She went on to study dance in college and then received her Masters Degree in Choreography from the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA).

## Dance Theater

Dance is an ancient art form that has been used throughout history for religious purposes, for entertainment and amusement or to tell a story. Dance that tells a story by using theatrical elements—such as costumes, props, lighting and music—is sometimes called “dance-theater”.

**Costumes**—CONTRA-TIEMPO's dance entitled “Against the Times” uses costumes that have been made popular by ballroom Salsa dance. The costumes are black and red, which are contrasting colors. Black and Red are also the colors of *Eleggua*, an Afro-Cuban God who represents the gate keeper. He breaks down barriers and opens up gates and opportunities for future possibilities.

**Props**—In “Against the Times” dancers use props to convey meaning. Watch for a rope. In the beginning the rope represents the tension and resistance that is needed for the dance to work. It also represents the tension between members of a community, between sides of an issue, between conflicting opinions. Later on the rope represents borders and boundaries that hold people back, but are man made. Towards the end you will see dancers stretched across the stage and ID cards held in their hands. What information does an ID say about you? Your address, your race, your gender. Does an ID really represent who you are as a person?

**Special Effects**—“Against the Times” uses voice over and video images to tell a story. The voice over is used to let the audience know what the dancers are thinking. The video is used to relate the lives and stories of the dancers to a larger context. The video connects the struggles and challenges of the characters in the piece to other teachers, students, union organizers, factory workers, farmers, activists and community members. The themes of this piece connect us all, no matter where you are from or where you are going.

**Metaphor:  
Comparing  
two things to  
suggest the  
likeness  
between  
them:**

**Example:  
Life is a  
dance**

**Look for  
metaphors in  
*Against the  
Times***

## What is Salsa?

The word Salsa means 'sauce'; a combination of many different ingredients to create a burst of flavors. Salsa is a style of dance and music that originated in Cuba from a mix of many styles—African and Spanish influences, Afro-Puerto Rican rhythms and the American Jazz scene.

**Salsa**—Salsa is a partner dance that allows the dancers to improvise and incorporate their own creativity into each dance. Salsa began as a social dance form, done in people's homes, parties, clubs and family gatherings. It was a way for people to connect with one another. The music and lyrics were about the everyday struggles and realities of the people who danced it.

**Rueda**—In Cuba, a new form of Salsa was created in the 1960's, called *Rueda de Casino*. 'Casino' refers to the big night clubs in Havana, where the dance began. *Rueda* means wheel in Spanish, and refers to the shape of the dance. Pairs of dancers form a circle, with dance moves called out in Spanish by one person. Many moves have hand signs to complement the calls, which are useful in noisy dance clubs.

**Today**—Salsa has spread internationally and can be found on every continent in almost every big city around the world. It can still be found in homes, parties, and clubs in addition to performance halls and dance studios. As Salsa has become popular, many people now learn Salsa steps, but the original way to connect with others in a community is often lost.

## Against the Times

**CONTRA-TIEMPO** in Spanish means against time. It also means the off beat. The piece 'Against the Times' is about standing up for what you believe in, even if it is against or in contrary to what others believe or think is right. It is a piece about pushing against whatever is holding you back, in order to have your voice be heard.

**Inspiration**—"Against the Times" was the first piece that Ana Maria Alvarez ever choreographed for the company. The piece was originally created in response to new laws being passed in California and all around the country, labeling people as 'illegals'. The artists wanted to make a statement, that all people have a right to have a voice.

**Tension and Resistance**—When you dance, you communicate without speaking or using words. When you learn to dance Salsa, you have to have tension between your arms in order to communicate with your partner. This tension is called resistance. Resistance can sometimes be seen as a bad thing, but resistance is needed for clear communication. Each partner understands more clearly what the other is asking if resistance is present. You will hear the characters' voices say "Push Back" - they are talking about the dance, but also about life.

**Creating the Piece**—The dance uses a combination of choreography and improvisation. The recorded voices are the voices of the dancers as they speak about Salsa and their relationship to it. Cesar Alvarez, the company's composer, created a sound score using these voices. Ana Maria wrote the rest of the piece and developed the choreography through working with the other company members. There are parts of the piece that Ana Maria choreographed so that all of the dancers are moving together in unison. At other times, the dancers are improvising and creating their own movements within a structure.

## Performance Etiquette

Every style of performance has appropriate etiquette or manners. Dance is intended to be watched and appreciated by the audience in the same way that you would listen intently to a book as it is read aloud. It is considered impolite for the audience to talk, whisper, or move during the performance because these behaviors make it difficult for others to hear and often distract the performers. CONTRA-TIEMPO's work does allow for some audience participation. As an audience member, if you think something is funny, you can laugh out loud. If you think something is excellent or surprising, you can clap out loud, and even cheer. The performers depend on the audience to be respectful, but also to be engaged and involved in the performance.

Here are some rules of etiquette:

- 1) Enter the auditorium quietly, using a whispering voice. This sets the tone for the rest of the performance.
- 2) Once you are seated, stay seated until the end of the performance. You should not leave to go to the restroom or get a drink of water.
- 3) When the curtain goes up, it is time to be quiet, and enjoy!
- 4) In dance, the audience can applaud and cheer after the end of a sequence and definitely at the end of the show.
- 5) At the end of the performance, the performers come back on the stage for the "curtain call." Standing up to clap at the curtain call is a great way to let the performers know that you really enjoyed the show. This is called a standing ovation.

**Salsa eventually moved out of homes and clubs and began moving onto stages for tourists. It became a 'representation' of Cuban music and dance.**



## Resources for Students

### READ:

Cuba, the Culture by Susan Hughes & April Fast

### WATCH:

Mad Hot Ballroom (PG)  
Buena Vista Social Club (G)

### LISTEN TO:

Ruben Blades (Panama)  
Celia Cruz (Cuba)  
Tito Puente (Puerto Rico)

### GO ONLINE:

[www.contra-tiempo.org](http://www.contra-tiempo.org)