

Ana Maria Alvarez

BIOGRAPHY

<http://www.contra-tiempo.org/aboutus.html#bios>

Ana Maria Alvarez (Artistic Director, Choreographer and Dancer) After receiving a BA in Dance and Politics from Oberlin College, Alvarez moved to New York where she became the Dance Specialist at The Center for Family Life in Brooklyn. 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, where she currently teaches. Alvarez collaborated with teachers and researchers to create a dance program at UCLA's Lab Elementary School, which became the foundation for CONTRA-TIEMPO's arts education program. CONTRA-TIEMPO is currently partnering with many schools throughout Southern California, integrating dance in their educational curriculum. Alvarez has received numerous awards and recognition from the arts world and beyond, including Brooklyn Arts Exchange's Artist in Progress Award and from The Association of Performing Arts Presenters Emerging Leaders Institute, The Los Angeles City Council of District 11,



The Durfee Foundation, The Flourish Foundation, Festival Internacional de Teatro de Los Angeles' (FITLA) and Instituto de Cultura de Puerto Rico, among others. Recognized as a "Rising star of the dance world" (Backstage NY 2002), Alvarez is inspired to continue to develop and share her artistic vision with the world through CONTRA-TIEMPO's dynamic work.

ARTIST STATEMENT

As a Cuban American choreographer, I see clearly that my role in society is to be a change maker and cultural activist. My job is to engage, and to create opportunities for people to feel, relate and communicate with each other and with the subject material that I address in my work. I am committed to, and am creating stunning, poignant work that moves audiences. While engaging, my work also challenges notions of how the forms that I use can be utilized and developed in performance. What I am doing with Salsa and Latin social dance is very different from the work of other choreographers creating within these forms. I am addressing difficult and critical issues by using genres that have for decades been used as 'celebratory dances'. I am challenging the power of these 'ethnic' forms to really speak articulately for the people from which they originated. Most people using these forms, use them to further perpetuate stereotypes. I am committed to doing just the opposite.

Artistic Statment

Salsa is a dance form that is rooted in Cuban and Puerto Rican cultural tradition. It is laden with social and political contradictions; a dance of resistance. Salsa is an improvisational form that is created and recreated with every new combination of people that dance it; a dance of change. Born from the fusion of African and Spanish musical influences, it was originally created as a cultural voice and form of expression for working class people; a dance of the times. Salsa has always been a patriarchal dance form, in that men are leaders and women are followers. In more recent times, the over sexualized representations of women have gotten more extreme, especially in styles that have been popularized by ballroom dancing and in Hollywood films. In my work, I flip the script on who leads who... I create the space where men dancing with men, women dipping men, and women leading are all completely normal. This resistance is the key to really grasping the form - in the music with the clave and off beats, and in the dance with the tension between the partners'

arms and bodies. Speaking metaphorically, I switch this resistance from being adversarial to being the fundamental key for communication and empowerment between partners and for a people.

By connecting Salsa with Modern, Afro-Cuban and hip hop in my choreography, and performing this work in prestigious venues, festivals, performances, I am further developing and legitimizing Salsa as a prolific and creative form. The racial and class positionings of the people from which the form originated allow numerous possibilities for Salsa to be a revolutionary form that creates social change and cultural resistance. It is my goal and interest as an avid lover of this dance form, and as someone who feels very connected to Salsa culturally, to create a space for it to actualize its potential as an agent of change and a voice of social and cultural expression.

My choreographic work is processing meaning for and by the communities from which this dancing originated, yet pushing those same communities to question and think critically about their own realities and circumstances. At the same time the work affects those outside of these communities by being absolutely engaging and high quality. Those disconnected from that experience can then relate. Choreography inspired by and based on those whose story I am bringing to life on stage gives my work an authenticity and energy that no audience member or critic can deny. The work feels real – it is real – and therefore allows each audience member to relate to it as such.

PREVIOUS WORKS

DUET (7 Minutes): The Duet is a piece about power. An audience favorite, it captures beautifully the humorous and sometimes frustrating opposition between fighting and giving in

SIDES/LADOS (11 Minutes): Sides/Lados is a movement and sonic exploration of the pushes and pulls that result from a bi-cultural identity and specifically a Cuban-American identity. Debuted at the Ninth International Electro-Acoustic Music Festival "Primavera en la Habana" in Havana, Cuba March 2002. The Alvarez duo uses their own mediums to collage and depict the conflict and harmony that comes out of a distinctly split cultural heritage. Link to an article about it: <http://www.oberlin.edu/con/bkstage/200202/alvarez.html>

"I DREAM AMERICA" (40 Minutes): "I Dream America" is a 40-minute movement opera, which primarily seeks to engage the tensions, commonalities, strains and histories between the Black and Latino communities. Traversing the political landscape of immigration and Hurricane Katrina, "I Dream America" investigates compassion and peace and paints a disarming and thought-provoking critique of contemporary life and injustice. Parts of the piece were debuted in Mexico in October (2006) as part of the Festival Internacional de Teatro de Los Angeles (FITLA). The first full performance of this work was debuted in Los Angeles at the Unknown Theater in July 2007, and later toured to North Carolina and Georgia in September 2007

Press About Ana Maria Alvarez and Contra-Tiempo

"Alvarez is a rising star of the dance world"

"A performance the moves beyond just dance, but expresses with its movements the strength of the Latino community in their struggle as they live in a country that is not their own. "– Leonard Jacobs, NY NY

"The new face of Los Angeles dance, and the new voice as well" – Lewis Segal, Los Angeles Times

"LA-based company CONTRA-TIEMPO is aking waves with its bold approach to teaching and performance" – Dance Teacher Magazine