

# CONTRA-TIEMPO Futuro



The pedagogy and practice of socially-transformative dance for  
democracy

# Who we are and what Futuro is

- CONTRA-TIEMPO is an LA-based, socially-engaged Urban Latin Dance Theater company, founded in 2005 by Ana Maria Alvarez
- Futuro began in 2011 as a two-week Summer Dance Intensive
- Futuro provides a space for youth (14-25 years old) that honors and teaches their movement cultures, encourages and cultivates their critical minds, and nurtures their development as whole, healthy, visionary leaders.
- Students learn foundational dances of Urban Latin Dance technique and art-as-social-action principles
- Now includes the Summer Dance Intensive and a year-round Junior Company

# Who are YOU?

- Che Che Kule (warm-up activity to energize the body--a Ghanaian song/dance)
- This Voice is MY Voice (warm-up activity to claim the circle/space)

**Join the Movement**

# What is democracy?

- What is democracy?
- What would/does education for democracy look like? What would an education that both epitomizes democracy and prepares citizens to fully participate in and lead a democracy look like?

# CONTRA-TIEMPO's assertions about democracy

In a true democracy:

- There is full participation and engagement in community from all members of society.
- Everyone understands and believes that they have expertise, knowledge, ideas, and gifts to share. This is their “voice”.
- Each member of society believes that their voice is equal to (no less important and no more important than) everyone else's voice.
- Systems and institutions reflect the understanding that everyone having ample opportunities to share their expertise, knowledge and gifts is **ESSENTIAL** to the success of the entire society
- Systems and institutions create the space needed to both be heard and to **LISTEN**

# Futuro's guiding truths

CONTRA-TIEMPO *Futuro* disrupts the non-democratic, hierarchical paradigm of the traditional classroom and presents a new way of working, learning, and being together.

Truths:

- The teacher is student, and the student is teacher.
- Vulnerability, when supported, builds strength and confidence.
- The process is just as important as the performance/product.
- Reflection and dialogue are critical to learning.
- You can't divorce culture from the socio-historic context in which it was created.
- Art and action are two sides of the same coin.
- We can create a future that we believe in, even if it does not yet exist.

# The teacher is student and the student is teacher

- Professional dancers, “master teachers”, and beginners all take classes together. Students see that regardless of skill level, we’re always learning, refining, improving, and “messing up”.
- Because there are so many experience levels and so many styles represented in the room, students see that we all have something to teach, and they understand that there is knowledge and expertise already in the room.
- Through teaching dance, especially Salsa Rueda, we teach principles of compassionate leading and empowered/powerful following. It’s the “step up/step back” principle in action. (What is a leader without a follower; a talker without a listener?)
- Acknowledging and working from these beliefs creates supportive, egalitarian relationships in the program



# Vulnerability builds strength and confidence

- Teachers are transparent in our teaching. Students see us “mess up”, reconfigure, try it again, etc. They learn that when you’re in an environment where you know that the community “has your back”, you’re free to continue trying and improving. When you’re always the expert, you have no space to learn, and it becomes a burden.
- We require full participation. It’s not okay to sit on the sidelines or to not commit. BUT this is coupled with an atmosphere of non-judgment, compassion, and love.
- The cypher (circle of dancers with one dancer in the middle) is a space where we emphasize being genuine, spontaneous, and present. It’s also a space where everyone cheers you on and supports you, no matter what you’re doing or how well you’re doing it--as long as you’re committed and passionate about it.
- This all builds confidence, which strengthens character and voice.

# The process is just as important as the product

- During the final performance, students have to demonstrate two dance forms: one that they're good at, and one that they struggle with. This gives students control over the evaluation process and underscores the idea that we're always learning and that it's okay to be wherever you are in your learning process.
- As with inquiry-based education, students direct the conversation and the learning. We create experiences and spaces for dialogue and reflection, but where they take it and what they take away from it is something we don't control.
- The focus on process not only involves the students, but the teachers, too. Every day the teachers meet in a learning community to talk about what we're experiencing.

# You can't divorce culture from the context that created it

- We don't just teach movements and choreography. We teach the social history and meaning of the dances, so students can create deeper movement, and so they develop respect and understanding of cultures represented in the dances.
- Without learning the histories, you're deleting the "voice" and humanity from the creators.
- We use a lot of Theatre of the Oppressed activities in our work, to help students analyze, think about, frame and re-frame how they perceive their experiences.
- There is institutional racism and classism in the art world, with the concept of "high art" vs. "folk art". We subvert that by centering social/ "street" dance forms.

# Art and action are two sides of the same coin

- When we begin to explore histories of contemporary dances of the Americas, we begin to unearth systematic injustices and oppression. The dialogue begins to raise questions like, how can we ensure that these injustices don't continue?
- When people begin to feel confident in their "voice" and see themselves as artists/creators, they feel empowered to question things that don't make sense, things that are unjust, etc. This questioning of the status quo, even if just an internal conversation, is the foundation of social action.
- Dancing and creating art in a supportive, diverse environment builds a compassionate community of human beings who walk through the world with love. This in itself is a powerful action, that when replicated, can create the world we know is possible.

# Connect with us!

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