

# BACKSTAGE<sup>east</sup><sup>TM</sup>

THE ACTOR'S RESOURCE

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## DANCE/MOVEMENT

BY LISA JO SAGOLLA

### Dance From the Fringe

#### 'Contra-Tiempo'

A joyous performance of very authentic-feeling salsa dancing created and performed by Ana Maria Alvarez and her company of dancers from Los Angeles, *Contra-Tiempo*, presented at Dance New Amsterdam, left us wanting more. The program's centerpiece, a complex group work also titled "Contra-Tiempo," comically explores the diversity of the salsa dancing community while also using the dance form to portray the thorny social and political issues facing Latinos in America today. The stage is filled with couples doing salsa, each in their own style; though strictly choreographed, the dancing evokes an air of true improvisation. One at a time, different individuals are illuminated as we hear a recording of their inner thoughts about the dance and what it means to them.

Emerging from the series of personal comments is the theme of dominance and a man's role as leader—on the dance floor, in relationships, and in society at large. This theme is smartly developed as the piece grows increasingly more theatrical. Hints of "The Dance at the Gym" from *West Side Story* creep into the proceedings and the choreography becomes violently aggressive. Battles for control contaminate the smooth phrasing of the salsa dancing. While Alvarez undoubtedly wants to challenge traditional notions of gender, power, and cultural assimilation, her piece, ironically, is most appealing during the sequences in which the male and female dancers exhibit smooth finesse as they salsa together in traditional style. It is, nonetheless, a marvelously energetic and affecting work.

"Contra-Tiempo" was book-ended, however, by two underdeveloped endeavors. "Al Alba Ache," an animated film of adorably drawn dancing figures, opened the program. Created by Omar Rodriguez Diaz, the film was over before one could register any impression of its meaning, but it was such great fun that we felt cheated by its brevity.

Closing the program was "I Dream America," an extremely moving crossover that felt like an opening thematic statement—and a very promising one at that. What happened to the rest of the piece? One at a time, dancers cross diagonally through the space, traversing from upstage left to downstage right with slow-motion, salsa-seasoned, pedestrian movements. Their procession is accompanied by the recorded voice of a 12-year-old girl reading a poem she had written about her mother's courageous immigration to Los Angeles to make a better life for her family. The combination of the simple yet deeply felt choreography with the youngster's inspiring words suggests the beginnings of a monumental dance piece about the American immigrant experience. Please, Ana, will you complete the work? <