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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



Pictured: Alayo Dance Company. Photo by Tom Ehrlich

**CubaCaribe presents**  
**20th Annual CubaCaribe Festival of Dance & Music**  
***Mirando atras, moviendo pa'lante / Looking back, Moving forward***  
**April 8-19 in San Francisco**

**A retrospective of 20 years of performances and a celebration of moving forward in community, resistance and joy.**

Featuring two weeks of performances and events, including  
a very special lecture demonstration by  
seven-time Grammy® nominee and 2026 CubaCaribe Honoree John Santos  
Performing companies include Alayo Dance Company, Aguacero, Alafia Dance Ensemble,  
Arenas Dance Company, Cunamacué, Juntos, and Los Lupeños de San José.

**VIDEO TEASER:** <https://vimeo.com/1163721482?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=cj>

For tickets and information: <https://www.cubacaribe.org/2026>

SAN FRANCISCO, February 10th, 2026 - The **20th Annual CubaCaribe Festival of Dance and Music** presents a celebratory retrospective of the last 20 years of moving forward in community, resistance and joy. For two decades, CubaCaribe continues to showcase traditional, often unseen, master artists of the Cuban and Caribbean diasporas. This anniversary season features seven dance companies performing and participating in community engagement and educational outreach activities over the course of the festival's 14 days. A special highlight of the festival is an April 8 **lecture demonstration by master percussionist and internationally renowned seven-time Grammy® nominee John Santos, who will be honored by CubaCaribe in a pre-show event on April 12. The Festival runs April 8 through 19 at various locations in San Francisco and Berkeley. Tickets, \$15-\$60, are available at <https://www.cubacaribe.org/2026>.**

"Our way forward is by lifting up artists who have been doing this work for years, but who don't necessarily have the production means to work at a big scale," says Executive Director Jamaica Iltule. "This year we've brought back works that have had a significant impact and we've invested in a major premiere. We're thrilled to be honoring what we've done while continuing to look forward."

#### **WEEKEND ONE: April 10-12 at ODC Theater, San Francisco**

The first weekend entitled, *Looking back and Moving forward/ Mirando atras, moviendo pa'lante*, will feature six diverse pieces by acclaimed Bay Area Caribbean and Latinx performing artists and their companies, chosen for their artistry and impact from past festival performances over the last 20 years by Artistic Director Ramón Ramos Alayo. Many will be accompanied by live music performed by ensembles of master instrumentalists and vocalists. Performing companies include **Alayo Dance Company** (Afro-Cuban Modern; Artistic Director, Ramón Ramos Alayo), **Arenas Dance Company** (Afro-Cuban Folkloric; Artistic Director Susana Arenas Pedroso), **Los Lupeños de San José** (Mexican Folkloric; Artistic Director Samuel Cortez), **Cunamacué** (Afro-Peruvian; Artistic Director Carmen Roman), **Alafia Dance Ensemble** (Afro-Haitian; Artistic Director Mariella Morales) and **Juntos** (Cuban Youth Ensemble).

#### **WEEKEND TWO: April 17 at Ruth Williams Opera House, San Francisco**

The second weekend entitled, *Enraizando/ Rooting Within* features work by **Shefali Shah** and **Aguacero**. This evening length performance highlights the transitional experience and journey of young women facing womanhood through Puerto Rican Bomba music and dance. Commissioned by CubaCaribe from the Gerbode Foundation, *Enraizando* is a major multi-year multi-generational project, involving teen and young adult dancers alongside the professionals of Aguacero.

Shah explains, "As women we are often forced early on to ignore or hide the more vulnerable parts of our stories in order to endure a world that dispossesses us of our essence through patriarchal and racist violence." She adds, "Through *Enraizar*, young women of color challenge this by telling stories that show how they go within and embrace their vulnerabilities to become stronger and more confident versions of themselves.

#### **SPECIAL EVENTS**

CubaCaribe features a variety of special events, with such highlights as:

### **Lecture/Demo with John Santos: Opening Event**

**Wednesday, Apr 8, 7pm at Museum of the African Diaspora, SF**

The Festival presents a very special evening with seven-time Grammy® nominee, master percussionist, and historian, **John Santos**. He will give the multi-media presentation, *De un Pájaro las dos Alas (Two Wings of the Same Bird): The Parallel Colonial Histories that Unite the Music of Cuba and Puerto Rico*. Santos discusses the joined musical traditions of Cuba and Puerto Rico: their shared colonial experience of genocide, slavery and US intervention created a similar foundation for musical resistance and self-expression that resulted in iconic, internationally renowned musical forms such as Salsa and Latin Jazz as well as lesser known forms.

### **Honoree Ceremony of John Santos**

**Sunday April 12, 4pm at ODC Theater, SF**

Before the show CubaCaribe pays tribute to Santos' community contributions as a musician, composer, educator and historian. Free with admission.

### **Ritmo, Palabra y Movimiento: Una peña**

**Wednesday April 15, 7pm at CANA: Indigenous Peoples Cultural Arts Healing Center, SF**

An artistic community gathering, celebration to preserve dance, music, culture and connection. A showcase and dance party with DJ, homemade Cuban food and drinks available for purchase.

### **Rooting Within: Connecting roots from the Bay Area to Borikén, Photo exhibit opening Friday April 17, 5:30pm at Ruth Williams Opera House, SF**

This exhibit documents photographer Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi's journey alongside Shefali Shah and the *Enraizar* crew. It not only traces the collective's journey, but also honors the landscapes and communities that hold it—from the culture keepers of Puerto Rico, stretching from Loíza to Mayagüez, to the Boricua diaspora in the Bay Area—each sustaining ancestral knowledge through Bomba. Exhibit will run April 17- May 31st. Free with admission.

### **Bombatey & Artist Panel: Closing Event**

**Sunday April 19, 2:30-6:30pm at La Peña Cultural Center, Berkeley**

A community gathering/jam for dancers, singers, and drummers gather to celebrate Puerto Rican music and dance culture and tradition. Featuring Aguacero and guest musicians, dancers and community members and an artist panel with Shefali Shah and collaborators of *Enraizando/Rooting Within*. Co-hosted by Aguacero, CubaCaribe and La Peña Cultural Center

Additional community and educational programs include dance/drum workshops at ODC Theater and Dance Mission Theater. For more information, <https://www.cubacaribe.org/2026>

**COMPLETE ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#).**

### **ABOUT CUBACARIBE**

CubaCaribe Festival of Dance and Music is the only platform dedicated to bringing together Bay Area artists from the Cuban and Caribbean diaspora to show their work and build and strengthen their community. Co-founded by visual artist/dancer Jamaica Itule and dancer/choreographer Ramón Ramos Alayo on the principle that dance, music and visual art have the power to unite people of diverse perspectives, the Festival provides financial support to artists and connects them to their artistic peers, nurturing artistic growth and promoting new insights into the ways different cultural traditions of diaspora relate to, overlap, and veer away from each other. Given the recent political rhetoric specifically aimed at demonizing immigrants,

the Festival has taken on new relevance and urgency. The Festival's ability to showcase the exceptional and unique artistic contributions of dancers and musicians from the Caribbean diaspora counteracts negative stereotypes and provides space to celebrate and build solidarity amongst a vital, proud and strong artistic community.

CubaCaribe is funded in part by National Arts Relief Fund, The Zellerbach Family Foundation, San Francisco Grants for the Arts Hotel Tax Fund, The San Francisco Foundation, The San Francisco Arts Commission, The Fleishhacker Foundation, The Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Gerbode Foundation, Creative west which receives support in part by the NEA, The Campbell Foundation, CalOSBA, Sol Food, Cubita and individual donors.

**MORE INFORMATION:** <https://www.cubacaribe.org/>

“The annual CubaCaribe Festival...has long served as an essential showcase for Cuban culture, advancing the always cogent argument that music and dance are often inextricably linked. Rather than seeing Cuba in isolation, the festival takes a wide-angle view, presenting the nation as the linchpin of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora via presentations exploring religion, history, politics and cultural expression.” - *San Jose Mercury News*

**CALENDAR LISTING**  
*Dance, Theater, Music, Performing Arts*

**20th Annual CubaCaribe Festival of Dance & Music**  
***Mirando atras, moviendo pa'lante / Looking back, Moving forward***

Ramón Ramos Alayo, Artistic Director / Co-Founder

Jamaica Itule, Executive Director / Co-Founder

**Performances by Alayo Dance Company, Arenas Dance Company, Los Lupeños de San José, Cunamacué, Alafia, Aguacero and Moving Juntos Youth Ensemble**

**BOX OFFICE:** <https://www.cubacaribe.org/2026>

**TICKET PRICES:** \$15-\$60

**WEEKEND ONE: *Mirando atras, moviendo pa'lante / Looking back, Moving forward***  
**(Mixed Program)**

**WHEN:**

Friday April 10 at 8pm

Saturday April 11 at 8pm

Sunday April 12 at 4pm\*

\*Includes Pre-Show celebration  
honoring John Santos

**WHERE:**

ODC Theater

3153 - 17th Street

San Francisco, CA 94110

**WEEKEND TWO: *Enraizar/ Rooting Within* by Shefali Shah & Aguacero**

**WHEN:**

Friday April 17 at 7pm\*

Saturday April 18 7pm

\*Includes post-show artist Q&A

**WHERE:**

Ruth Williams Opera House

4705 3rd Street

San Francisco, CA 9412

**SPECIAL EVENTS: April 8-19**

- April 8- **Lecture/Demo with John Santos**, Museum of the African Diaspora, SF
- April 12 - **Honoree Ceremony of John Santos**, ODC Theater, SF
- April 15 - **Ritmo, Palabra y Movimiento: Una peña**, CANA: Indigenous Peoples Cultural Arts Healing Center, SF
- April 17- **Photo Exhibit: Rooting Within: Connecting roots from the Bay Area to Borikén**, Ruth Williams Opera House, SF
- April 19 - **Bombatey: Closing Event**, La Peña Cultural Center, Berkeley
- And more!

**VIDEO TEASER:** <https://vimeo.com/1163721482?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=cj>

**MORE:** <https://www.cubacaribe.org/>

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