

20th Annual Festival of Music & Dance Artist Biographies

Alafia Dance Ensemble was founded in 1993 by Valerie Watson, ADE was based out of the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) dance program. Watson was affiliated with CCSF for over 45 years, where she studied Haitian dance as a student. This is the company's 8th appearance in the CubaCaribe Festival. We are thrilled to participate in the 20th celebration.

Alayo Dance Company was founded by Ramón Ramos Alayo in 2004. Ramos was a principal dancer with several prominent Cuban dance companies, including Danza del Caribe and Narciso Medina Contemporary Dance Company, touring throughout Europe, Belize, and Canada. Since relocating to the U.S. in 1997 he has performed with Robert Henry Johnson, Kim Epifano, Sara Shelton Mann, Zaccho Dance Theatre and Robert Moses' Kin. He founded Alayo Dance Company in 2002 and CubaCaribe in 2003. His work is an innovative fusion of Afro-Cuban modern, folkloric and popular Cuban Dance, having choreographed and produced twelve full length dance performances. He has been featured in National Geographic Magazine, received the prestigious Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation Emerging Choreographer's Award, was recognized as "Best Dance Dynamo" by the SF Bay Guardian, was the recipient of a SF Bay Guardian Goldie Award, and has been hailed by dance critic Rita Felciano as "the best Afro-Cuban dancer whose choreography stands well beyond traditional modes." His piece Goodbye was named one of the best premieres in 2016 in Dance Europe Magazine.

Aguacero is an artistic, educational, and cultural project that focuses on the traditions and creative expressions of Puerto Rican Bomba music and dance. Aguacero literally means a sudden heavy rainstorm usually followed by a refreshing sky clearing and gust of sunshine. The spirit and practice of Bomba, like an aguacero, is intense, healing and promotes life and growth. Through song, music and dance, Aguacero embodies the life, energy, and continuity of water in nature.

Aguacero came together in 2006 as a collective of skilled Bay Area dancers, musicians, poets and songwriters practicing, studying, and performing Bomba and other Puerto Rican and Caribbean folkloric traditions. Aguacero carries out its vision to create and share new original works in Bomba and to affirm perspectives and expressions of the genre rooted in the teachings of our masters and ancestors. Aguacero was featured in the 2008 West Wave Dance Festival at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and several years at the Cuba Caribe Festival in San Francisco. The collective has performed in numerous other festivals and Universities all over California including the San Jose, Oakland, and Alameda County Puerto Rican Day Festivals, and at UC Berkeley, Sonoma State, Humboldt State University. In 2016, Aguacero was featured at the BomPlenazo in New York City. Aguacero has collaborated and performed with Los Pleneros de la 21 and with members of La Familia Cepeda, as well as other renowned masters and practitioners from Puerto Rico. Shefali Shah is the founder and artistic director of Aguacero. Hector Lugo and Roman "Ito" Carrillo are the collective's musical directors and mentors. Aguacero is available for performances, lecture demonstrations, and educational workshops.

Bomba is Puerto Rico's oldest living music and dance tradition. Bomba originated in the sugar cane plantations of the island over 400 years ago where enslaved people from Africa and the Caribbean were brought to work under harsh conditions. Bomba became a common language, medicine to emotionally escape oppression, and a way to plan escapes from the plantations through song codes.

Cunamacué is an Oakland-based Afro-Peruvian performing arts organization founded in 2010 to produce, present, and preserve Afro-Peruvian cultural traditions as living, evolving art forms. Through original choreography, live music, festivals, film, and community-based education, Cunamacué amplifies the history, cultural knowledge, and contemporary voices of African descendants from Peru. Rooted in Afro-Peruvian dance, Cunamacué's movement vocabulary draws from modern dance and other African Diasporic forms to explore themes of ancestry, resilience, and belonging. We are committed to equitable access to high-quality arts experiences and provide free or low cost programs for communities of color, youth, and adults, across the San Francisco Bay Area.

John Santos is a master percussionist, internationally renowned seven-time Grammy nominee, composer, producer, bandleader, educator and cultural activist. He is a keeper of the Afro-Caribbean flame steeped in Cuban and Puerto Rican folkloric traditions as well as salsa and Latin jazz. A 2012 San Francisco Latino Heritage Arts Awardee, born and raised in San Francisco's Mission District amidst an extended family of Puerto Rican musicians, he's been at the center of the Bay Area's Latin music scene for over five decades. He has written, recorded and published well over 100 original compositions. He served on the Smithsonian Institution's Latin Jazz Advisory Committee, was SFJAZZ Resident Artistic Director (2013 & 2014) and has played an essential role in expanding Latin jazz's rhythmic lexicon beyond the foundational Cuban grooves. He has produced a steady stream of critically acclaimed, peer-respected recordings on his Machete Records label since 1984 and has travelled the world as a performer, teacher and lecturer since the mid-eighties. He was founder and director (1985-2006) of the internationally renowned, Grammy-nominated Machete Ensemble, and currently directs the Cubadisco-nominated, John Santos Sextet. The documentary film, Santos: Skin to Skin about his life's work, premiered at SFJAZZ, the Mill Valley Film Festival, and Cinefest in Puerto Rico in the Fall of 2023.

Los Lupeños de San José was established in 1969. Samuel Cortez Balderas is the current Artistic Director. Los Lupeños de San José stands out as one of the pioneering Mexican folk dance companies in the United States. Our company is passionately dedicated to promoting Mexican culture and traditions through the beautiful art of dance.

Moving Juntos