

The Arts III:
Afro-Cuban Dance

Teacher's Packet

A KET professional development workshop for educators approved for Professional Development Training by the Kentucky Department of Education.

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The Arts III:

Afro-Cuban Dance

This 40-minute dance workshop led by Katherine Kramer introduces teachers at all levels to the forms and rhythms of Afro-Cuban dance. The program includes five segments: “Understanding the Clave Rhythm Pattern,” “Warming Up to the Clave Rhythm Pattern,” “Moving to the Clave Rhythm Pattern,” “Salsa Dancing,” and “A Latin Jazz Dance.” The workshop also could be used to provide direct instruction to high school students.

Through participating in this dance workshop, teachers will:

- Understand the basic rhythm pattern underlying Cuban music and dance
- Learn how this rhythm pattern translates into movement
- Learn how to do basic movements in Afro-Cuban dance

In addition to the instructor, Katherine Kramer, the program features drummer Kenneth Kramer Metzker and the following dancers:

Maria Arias
Erin Brown
Eleanor Clark
Andrea Dougherty

Beth Haye
Alexander Hume
Marianne McAdam
Stephania Melton

Kacey Thompson
Ricardo Valencia

About the Instructor

Katherine Kramer has been an artist-in-residence for over 15 years in Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, and many other states. She returns to Kentucky each year to conduct dance residencies in state schools for the Kentucky Arts Council. Katherine formerly lived in Lexington, where she founded and was the artistic director of the dance company Syncopated, Inc. Katherine is the content designer for the upcoming KET series, *DanceSense*. Her credits include serving as choreographer and movement coach for Robert Redford and Kristin Scott Thomas in the recent film *The Horse Whisperer*.

Professional Development Credit

Stage of Participant Development: Practice/Application

The Kentucky Department of Education has approved all KET Television Seminars for professional development credit if schools or districts choose to include them in their professional development plans. State approval numbers are not necessary per the May 1994 State Board meeting. Record these sessions as “KET Seminars.” Schools or districts may choose to include preparation and/or follow-up time as part of professional development.

Individual teachers who wish to use these seminars for professional development credit should check with their school professional development chair or district professional development coordinator.

Professional development can also be used to satisfy requirements for the fifth year program. Contact your local university or the Division of Teacher Education and Certification at 502-564-4606 for more information.

Background Information on Afro-Cuban Dance

Katherine Kramer

Afro-Cuban dance is one of many dance forms originating in Latin countries. Although they share some characteristics, the various forms of Latin dance also reflect the unique style and culture of their countries of origin. For example, we have flamenco dancing in Spain, the tango in Argentina, and the merengue in the Dominican Republic. The contexts of dance within these cultures also vary: people dance for social or for religious reasons, as part of rituals or community celebrations, and as performance art.

Disparate cultural influences have shaped the development of dance style and rhythms in Latin countries. For example, countries bordering on the Caribbean such as Colombia or Venezuela have a strong West African influence while indigenous cultures are an important influence in Central America. Further south, in Chile and Argentina, the dominant influence is Spanish.

Latin dance and music have also found their way into the United States. For the past 100 years, the musical traditions of Cuba—located just 90 miles south of Florida—have had a major impact on U.S. popular culture, an influence that continues to flourish. In the 1930's and 40's, Cuba gave us the mambo and the cha-cha. More recently, Cuba has exported salsa music to the U.S., along with popular musicians like Gloria Estevan and the Buena Vista Social Club.

The music of the island has its roots in Cuban history. When the Spanish settled Cuba, a combination of disease and abuse largely obliterated the native peoples. African slaves brought in to work on the sugar plantations soon outnumbered Europeans. Although Cuba's African population was undeniably oppressed, they also managed to preserve many rituals and customs, and their rhythms and instrumentation were eventually absorbed into existing Spanish musical culture.

The secular music characteristic of Cuban culture is called *son* (literally “sound”). As the first real Afro-Cuban music, it provides the foundation for modern salsa music. *Son* derives its complex rhythm and drumming from Africa, and its guitar instrumentation and poetic style from Spain.

Uniting Afro-Cuban music and dance is a rhythmic pattern called *clave*, meaning “key.” The word *clave* not only refers to this characteristic rhythm, it also refers to a Cuban percussion instrument consisting of two round polished sticks that are struck together. The *clave* pattern may be played on other percussion instruments as well. Even when *clave* is not explicitly present, Afro-Cuban musicians feel its pattern and dancers move to its rhythm. The *clave* pattern appears in every form of salsa.

Clave rhythm consists of two measures: one with three beats and one with two. It can be played two ways: 3-2 or 2-3, depending upon which measure is played first. The *clave* pattern is held together by a half-note pulse on beats one and three that maintains the stability of the rhythm. Dancers must understand the relationship between the pulse and the *clave* rhythm to dance the salsa with authenticity.

Understanding the complexities of *clave* rhythms is essential to performing Afro-Cuban dances. During the workshop, you will be able to see the step-by-step process through which dancers learn to incorporate the *clave* pattern into their movements.

Recordings Used During the Workshop

Buena Vista Social Club. *Buena Vista Social Club*. World Circuit/Nonesuch Records 779478-2 (1999)

Juan de Marcos and the Afro Cuban All Stars. *A Toda Cuba le Gusta*. World Circuit/Nonesuch Records WCD 049 (1996)

Juan de Marcos and the Afro Cuban All Stars. *Distinto, diferente*. World Circuit/Nonesuch Records 79501-2 (1999)

Putumayo Presents Cuba. Putumayo World Music PUTU 149-2 (1999)

Kentucky Arts Council Artists-in-Residence

Each year, the Kentucky Arts Council includes about 50 artists on its roster of artists-in-residence—writers, visual artists, instrumentalists, dancers, puppeteers, storytellers, actors—all available for teaching residencies in Kentucky schools. Schools may apply for 90-day residencies or for five to 10-day Teacher Incentive residencies.

To learn more about artists-in-residence, contact John Benjamin, the KAC Arts in Education program director, at 1-888-833-ARTS or e-mail John.Benjamin@mail.state.ky.us. You can also visit the KAC Web site at www.kyarts.org.

Dance Resources Available from KET

Arts Toolkit: Dance

Visit <http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/dance/> for information and online resources related to the KET Dance Arts Toolkit. The Toolkit includes videos, video excerpts, and accompanying teaching and informational materials to help you address Kentucky academic standards as well as to build your own knowledge of dance.

Kentucky teachers may order the Dance Toolkit from KET. Visit our ordering information page at http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/dance_order.htm for complete details.

Instructional Television

You can learn about the programs listed below and other instructional series and programs available from KET by searching our online Instructional Videos Catalog at www.ket.org/itvvideos/.

Dancing Threads: Community Dances from Africa to Zuni

Designed for students in grades P-8, this series of four 30-minute programs features outstanding performers teaching traditional Appalachian, African-American, and American Indian dances and “play party games.”

DanceSense

This 10-part series of 15 minute programs, geared toward grades 5-10, explores why people dance, dance elements and styles, dance in multicultural and historical contexts, and dance as an art form.

Professional Development Programs

Information about these programs may be found at the KET Professional Development Web site:

The Arts: A Content Course for Teachers, Seminar 2: Dance

This 90-minute professional development program provides teachers with standards-based illustrations of the elements and principles of dance.

The Arts II: West African Dance

This hour-long professional development workshop features dancer Harlina Churn Diallo and drummer Yaya Diallo of Louisville.

Editor’s Note: KET often airs Kentucky and national dance productions on its evening schedule (KET1 and KET2). To learn about current programming, check in *Visions*, KET’s program guide (available at the back of *Kentucky Monthly* magazine) or go to “Watch” on the KET Web site, www.ket.org.

Acknowledgments

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KET Production Staff

Sharon Bennett
Producer/Director

Darlene Carl
Office Manager

Anne Deck
Audio

Mary Duncan
Writer

Lynda Thomas
Coordinating Producer

Treg Ward
Videographer