

La Conga

Dance, forget, be reborn



It is a continuous roar that moves slowly; a rhythmic flow full of violence and electricity. Telluric force that explodes and unites. Thousands of people generating a powerful energy that will become supernatural when the dead jump in, when the spirits make the drums and irons – magical magnets – reach their maximum intensity. Rum speeds it all up. A burning sun in every vagina. Sweating of buckets. The blood boils. Sexuality in every contortion of the body. Grievances and aggressions. **Aguardiente**. Multicolored necklaces of African gods. Orula and Versace soaked in the sweat of the same body. Sour sweat and Chanel N°5 in the air. Changó and Eleguá underneath, next to the skin, and on the outside Saint Peter on the scapular. **Duérmeteminiño**. With small steps they move, possessed by joy, by liberation. With small steps hips sway, bodies left to convulse with pleasure: violent, unbridled slowness. Every being an earthquake. The piercing screech of the **corneta china** guides the players, demiurges who reproduce the thunder, the downpour, the whistling of the wind with their hands on the irons and the skins of dead animals, smoothed by fire. Every being a storm. With small steps, a tangle of males and females – with blurred reason and rhythm governing the bodies within that roar of a swollen river that flows slowly and hot like lava – moves through the city.

In each armpit a sun of ammonia. Grotesque masks. Fans, umbrellas and screams. **Elhombreylatierra**. There is pushing, there is touching, there is fighting, shouting and laughter. The animal overflows in each body and the only thing that matters is joy, diversion, release, because life is tedious and oppressive enough. The explosion of the **tamboras** incites the crackling of the **campanas** and stirs up an intricate and frenetic clattering in the **fondos** that gets into the bones and rocks the soul. **Bájelblumer**. Someone sings a joke. Five repeat it. Thousands echo it and there goes the crowd laughingly singing it, getting a greater kick, escaping from themselves. The players, in a trance, instead of becoming exhausted get fired up, their ingenuity builds, they hit with more force, ripping their fingers on the leather. Blood flows without pain. **Calambuco**. Neighbors also pile up on balconies and rooftops. Safe, protected from the commotion, they also enjoy themselves. Some child may be afraid that the noise could burst their chest, or upset their heartbeat. **Espéramenelsuelo**. Some despise the conga. Others fear it because they hate to rediscover themselves in it. Some enjoy it from a distance because they do not dare to immerse themselves in it, for fear of getting burned in it, for fear of being transfigured. Nobody remains indifferent. Down there, that pagan rite of purification, that cathartic collective cry, that atavistic talisman that is the conga, reaches a paroxysm. A current runs up their backs and electrifies them. Now they stream forward, charged, and feel the omnipresence of life, its power. And they feel gratitude, forgiving everything in that moment flooded with well-being, power and hope. Something in the air vibrates. Something invisible has awoken and is ascending... Time fades... disappears... The city is a maze of cliffs between which black, burning, living lava runs its course.

Explanation of terms used

Aguardiente: The Spanish collective name for alcoholic drinks typically consumed in Portugal, Spain and Latin America. From the Latin *aqua ardens*, which means fiery water or, literally, burning water.

Calambuco: Cheap form of liquor, very popular in Cuba, often brewed illegally. It is also goes by these colloquial names:

<i>Bájatelblumer</i>	(Dropyourunderwear)
<i>Duérmeteminiño</i>	(Gotosleepmyboy)
<i>Elhombreylatierra</i>	(Manandearth)
<i>Espéramensuelo</i>	(Waitformeontheground)

Corneta china, *taboras*, *campanas* and *fondos* are instruments typically used during a Cuban conga. The *corneta china* in particular is a unique Cuban trumpet.