

ARTIST PROFILE

ArtsConnection has a roster of over 350 teaching artists in the performing, visual, literary, and media arts. In each issue of THE CONNECTION we will profile a single teaching artist.

Yvette Martinez: director, dancer and choreographer of ¡Retumba!

Yvette Martinez has a long history with ArtsConnection. She began in 19987 as a Parent Liaison, where she coordinated family activities for our Young Talent Program. Since 1991, Ms. Martinez has been a teaching artist as a member of the group ¡Retumba!, an all female multicultural dance and percussion ensemble. She is a founding member of ¡Retumba!, which was formed in 1981 to celebrate Women's History Month.

Where is ¡Retumba! Teaching this year?

Five members of ¡Retumba! Are teaching weekly at CES 55 and CES 53 in the Bronx and at PS 196 in Queens, among other ArtsConnection programs. Our work will bring Afro-Caribbean, Latin American, West African and Brazilian music and dance to these schools.

Why are you a teaching artist? When I was a child growing up in the Bronx there was really a lack of information available about the music and dance of my culture. I didn't want that to happen for other children because I think that kind of cultural understanding helps you to know where you come from and where you are headed. Also, knowing about another person's culture breaks down stereotypes and allows people to really get to know each other. Exposing children to different dances and music is not just about entertainment, but much of it is about learning.



Photo: Virginia Dimsey

Yvette Martinez ▲ of ¡Retumba! works with students at a Queens school.

What makes ¡Retumba! Unique? I think one of the most important things ¡Retumba! Does is allow young girls to see something that they normally don't see—women playing percussion instruments. It is also important for young boys to see that too. People often ask me why ¡Retumba! is all women and I simply reply, "Why not?"

¡Retumba! also celebrates diversity. Our message is that no matter what culture you come from, what language you speak—we are all one world, one human race.

Are there any students over the years that really stick out in your mind? So many do, but one in particular came through the Young Talent Program and is now a teaching artist. Through dance, he really blossomed, even though he was at-risk academically, and that is always so satisfying and special to see. ■