

Dancing Contratiempo in Advent

by [Alfonso Sito Sasieta](#) in the [December 2024](#) issue

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Before we shimmy to the inn, we tether
our bodies to an instrument. We warm
up. We square up to each other & weather
zeal. More than spins, casineros crave form.

First, we must touch the body of the song.
We must feel its shape—the conga's *tun tun*
the thrum of the bass, indeed, the whole throng
of percussion that wants us to commune

with the 4 & 8, to relish each pause.
When partners wait, they dance *contratiempo*.
Stillness in motion slits the path to awe.
The angels will visit when our tempo

must change. The cowbell is glorious news.
A dainty handbell is what God eschews.

Casino (often called Cuban salsa) is a common Cuban popular dance.
Casineros sometimes dance *contratiempo* during the “cuerpo” of a song
and then switch to a *tiempo* during the “montuno” section to match
the increased intensity during the latter parts of the song.