

Cuban Music



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Styles

- **Bolero** (boh-LEH-roh) Is a Latin ballad and it is not to be confused with the Maurice Ravel composition of the same name. It is in the pretty slow tempo range but can sometimes have open vamps for improvisation that pick up in energy quite a bit, Such as in a Bolero-Son.
- **ChachaCHÁ** Some claim that this is the second section of the DANZON; others argue that it is a slower MAMBO. It was sometimes called a double MAMBO in New York since its basic dance step was the MAMBO with a double step in the fourth-to-first beats...chachaCHA! The CHACHACHA developed around 1953 in the hands of Cuban CHARANGAS. It was an elegantly hot music in its original flute-and-fiddle form.
- **Descarga** (des-CAR-gah) “Discharge” ... the slang of Latin musicians meaning jam session.
- **Guaguancó** (gwah-gwan-COH or wah-wahn-COH) African roots and was originally a drum form related to the RUMBA. Though it is often played in 4/4, it has a strong 6/8 feel. The basic rhythm is traditionally carried by three CONGA drums and usually includes a good deal of solo drumming. The modern GUAGUANCO is one of the few 2-3 reverse CLAVE forms.
- **Guaracha** (gwa-RAH-cha) The original Cuban GUARACHA was a topical song form for chorus and solo voice, with improvisation in the solo. It was presented in 3/4 and 6/8 or 2/4 time signature. The GUARACHA developed a second section, employed for much improvisation, as in the SON MONTUNO. It almost died out in the 1930s but is today one of the forms most commonly used by SALSA groups; a fast, cheerful rhythm with a basic chica-chica pulse. Some musicians credit its last section as the source for the instrumental MAMBO.
- **Mambo** (MAHM-boh) an Afro-Cuban form, which has its basis in the Congolese religious cults. Though Perez Prado once claimed to have created it in 1943, its growth is not attributable to any single musician. The big band MAMBO of the 1940s and 1950s developed contrasting brass-and-sax riffs, which many musicians regard as stemming from the last section of the GUARACHA.

- **Rumba** (ROOM-bah) Most of what Americans call RUMBAS were forms of the SON which swept Cuba in the 1930s. The Cuban RUMBA was a secular drum form with many variants, including the GUAGUANCO and the CUMBIA though modern musicians tend to regard all these as separate. A highly African percussion-and-voice form, its descendent variations are the be heard by groups called RUMBAS or RUMBONES. By analogy, a percussion section of a SALSA number, or a percussion-only jam session, is sometimes called a RUMBA or RUMBON.
- **Son** (sohn) perhaps the oldest and certainly the classic Afro-Cuban form. Some date it back to the 18th Century and place it in Oriente province. It is an almost perfect balance of African and Hispanic elements in Cuban music. It surfaced in Havana around WW I and became a popular urban music played by string-and-percussion quartets and septets. Almost all the numbers Americans called RUMBAS were, in fact, SONES, including "El Manicero" ("The Peanut Vendor"). Technically, the song was a form of SON derived from the street cries of Havana and called a PREGON. The SON rhythm of is strongly syncopated, with a basic chicka-CHUNG pulse.
- **Son Montuno** (sohn mon-TOON-oh) A reverse CLAVE (2-3) form, usually mid-paced or slow, with a pronounced CHUNG-chicka feel. The SON MONTUNO developed as a separate form from the general SON tradition. Its rhythmic pulse is almost the exact reverse of a SON. It was, like the GUARACHA, one of the first forms to include a second, improvised section, the MONTUNO. Though it is not fast, the Afro-Cuban SON MONTUNO has an intense, relentless quality highly suitable to the SALSA format.
- **Songo** (SON-goh) The Songo (along with some generic versions of the Mozambique) is probable the most imitated Cuban rhythm throughout the world today. It is a unique blend of Rumba and Son styles integrated with funk/fusion and jazz style improvisation. The rhythmic patterns are more syncopated and freer from repetition than the tumbao approach of the Son styles.
- **Salsa** (SAL-sah) A contemporary word for hot, up-tempo, creative Latin music, it means "gravy" or "sauce". Originally, it was used as a descriptive such as "swinging" or "funky". The origins of the present use are obscure, but it began to develop in the late 1960s. The style now has many other elements and SALSA is more precise than the earlier term, "Latin".
- **Latin Jazz** A hybrid of jazz and Latin music. Examples could range all the way from a Cuban number with a few Louis Armstrong phrases to a straight jazz number with a CONGA drum. It is most usefully confined to crosses with a Latin rhythm section, or those combining jazz and Latin elements and an instrumental frontline. Other fusions include Latin/Rock and Latin/Soul.

Instruments

- **Bongó** (bohn-GOH) A small double drum (held between the knees, resting on the claves of the seated musician).
- **Cencerro** (sen-SEH-roh) A large hand-held cowbell played with a stick. It produces two notes, depending upon where it is struck. In Cuban music and SALSA, it is usually played by the bongo artist when the band goes into the “ride” or MAMBO section after the main vocal. In good hands, it can drive an entire band with ever-increasing excitement and power.
- **Clave** Twin strikers of resonant wood used to play the CLAVE pattern.
- **Guíro** (GWEE-roh) Basically a scraper. The Cuban and Puerto Rican Guiro, often called Guayo in Puerto Rico, is made from a notched gourd and played with a stick or fork-like scraper. The singer often plays it.
- **Guíra** (GWEE-rah) (Dominican Republic) the guiro’s metal counterpart- it is a characteristic instrument used in merengue and is played with a metal, fork-like stick.
- **Maracas** (mar-RAH-kas) A tuned pair of rattles made from gourds filled from pebbles or seeds. It is one of a wide range of Amerindian-derived rattles.
- **Shekeré** (SHAY-keh-reh) An African-derived rattle made from a gourd, covered with beads in a net-like pattern.
- **Timbales** (teem-BAH-less) A percussion set-up consisting of two small metal-single headed drums mounted on a stand, with two cowbells, and very often a cymbal or other additions. The timbalero (timbale player) plays the “cascara” part on the shell. In the absence of timbales the drummer plays the cáscara on the shell of the Floor Tom, on the Cymbals or the Hi-Hat.

Types of orchestras

- **Charangas** (cha-RANG-gah) A Cuban dance orchestra consisting of flute backed by two or three fiddles, piano, bass and TIMBALES. CHARANGAS tended to play different dances from the Afro-Cuban CONJUNTOS, the most characteristic of which was the DANZON. CHARANGAS might range from large society units to small street bands. Modern CHARANGAS use the bongo and conga drums in the rhythm section and swing mightily in a light, precise, non-funky way.
- **Conjunto** (con-HOON-toh) In U.S. terms, this could be translated to mean “combo”. The classic Cuban CONJUNTO sprang from the carnival marching bands and combined voices, Trumpets, Piano, Bass, Conga, and Bongo. Over the years, CONJUNTOS began adding a Trombone and, in New York, substituting Trombones for Trumpets. The basic CONJUNTO sound is brassy and joyous.
- **Típico** (TEE-pee-coh) An imprecise but extremely important concept in modern SALSA. Literally it means “typical” or “characteristic”, but it is more generally used to identify the down- home, rural, popular styles of Latin countries.

Music sections

- **Clave** (CLA-veh) An offbeat 3-2 or 2-3 rhythmic pattern over two bars, it is the basis of all Cuban music into which all elements of arrangement and improvisation should fit. CLAVE is an African-derived pattern with equivalents in other Afro-Latin music. African music has no single equivalent of CLAVE, but much western and central African music is organized within an eight- beat frame which is the basis for many clave-like patterns, providing the underpinning for polyrhythmic interplay. The common 3-2 Cuban CLAVE varies in accent, according to the rhythm being played. It seems to be part of the inspiration for the two-bar bass pattern in modern black music. The 2-3 reverse clave is less common.
- **Cierre** (see-EH-reh) This is essentially a passage like a jazz break. The CIERRE can range from a two-note bongo phrase to a complicated pattern for full band, more like a bridge passage. Good CIERRES are fundamental to SALSA structure, but they are so varied and used in so many ways that more precision of definition would be misleading.
- **Coro** (COR-oh) The “chorus”. In SALSA, the two or three-voice refrains of two or four bars sung during MONTUNOS. The lead singer improvises against the refrains. COROS are used in various ways in arrangements: as reprises or, by an alteration of the refrain, to establish a change of mood.
- **Mambo section** A section of contrasting riffs for SALSA frontline instruments, balancing Trumpets against Saxes or Trombones for example. The section may also feature an instrumental solo. Said to be derived from the GUARACHA, it got its name when it became a main part of the MAMBO during the late 1940s and early 1950s.
- **Montuno section** (mon-TOON-oh) A vehicle for improvisation (solo section). It is based on a two or three-chord pattern repeated ad-lib under the instrumental or vocal improvisations. The piano often maintains a repeated vamp.
- **Tumbao** (Toom-BAH-oh) A repeated rhythmic pattern for *bass (guitar)* or *conga drums*. It offers a constant rhythmic counterpoint to the rhythms of the percussion section.
- **Sonero** (soh-NEH-roh) In the strict sense, a man who sings or plays the Afro-Cuban SON, but the word is now used for the improvising lead singer in the SALSA style. A good SONERO improvises rhythmically, melodically, and verbally against the refrain of the CORO. The improvised phrases are known as INSPIRACIONES or, sometimes, SONEOS. Since the GUARACHA was also improvised, the word GUARACHERO is a synonym, though less used.
- **Soneo** (soh-NEH-roh) Improvisation rhythmically, melodically, and verbally against the refrain of the CORO. Also called GUIAS.

Remember the clave!

- ! Decide 2/3 or 3/2 right away (Son, Rumba, etc.) Once the pattern is established, it does not change.
- ! Look for hints in the music (drum parts) if you cannot tell right away
- ! Look for hints in the melodic line or comping patterns. The Clave remains fixed, and the phrases revolve around it. An even number of measures constitutes no change in the direction of the clave, whereas, an odd number of measures creates a change in direction.
- ! Have an auxiliary percussion player either clap or play clave on a wood block
- ! If the tune is written in 6/8 you'll know to decide between either the 2/3 or 3/2 Afro-Cuban 6/8 clave

Remember that using the wrong clave pattern will make the whole tune “feel” wrong!

Clave

Son Clave 2/3



Son Clave 3/2



Rhumba Clave 2/3



Rhumba Clave 3/2



Chitlins Con Carne



COMMON SALSA PATTERN (2-3 CLAVE)

SON MONTUNO (MEDIUM TO MED. FAST)

TISSALES

CONGA

SONGOS

MARACAS

GUIRO

CLAVES

PIANO

BASS

Son/Son Montuno

- Originally played in an ensemble consisting of a Guitar, a Tres and Clave
- The usual Clave pattern of the Son Montuno is 2/3, but depending on the melody it can be a 3/2 pattern
- Notice that the Bass anticipates the harmony of the measure following

SONGO

Closed Hi-Hat

DRUM SET

CONGAS

CLAVES

PIANO

BASS

Modern Songo (Drum set Variation)

- Probably the most popular, most imitated Drum Set style.
- Combination many styles (Son, Rumba, Conga, fusion, funk).
- Very personalized and free style.
- Drummer should be proficient in basic patterns of the component styles.

MAMBO

DRUM SET

CLAVE (2/3)

COWBELL

CONGAS

PIANO

BASS

Mambo Section

- Mostly up-tempo musical style (faster than the Son Montuno)
- A repeating instrumental section of a song, also known as Montuno
- Originated in Cuba and evolved as a blending of the Mambo section, elements of the Son, and some influences of American Jazz orchestras.

CHA-CHA-CHA

MODERATELY $\text{♩} = 132$
L.H. CROSS RIM

DRUM SET



CLAVE (2/3)



GUIRO



CONGAS



PIANO



BASS



Cha-cha-chá

- Always played in 4/4 time with a bouncy 2/4 feel
- A dance and musical style derived from the early Cuban danzon-mambo
- World-wide audience appeal

SWEET DREAMS*

LATIN BALLAD $\text{♩} = 88$

MELODY

MARACAS

CONGAS
(OPT. ADD BONGOS)

CLAVE
(2/3)

PIANO

BASS

DRUM SET

Bolero

- A show lyrical ballad – not to be confused with the Maurice Ravel composition of the same name
- Usually placed at a show tempo
- Different than the Cha-cha-cha but rhythmically incorporates the same parts, especially in an open vamp section
- Typical Bass line rhythmic pattern is a half note followed by two quarter notes

CHICK ON THE GRILL*

BRIGHT $d_s = 126$

“Afro-Cuban 6/8”

- Derived from the fundamental rhythms in West Africa based on 6/8 feels
- Different styles of 6/8 are often defined by what is being played by the Congas or the characteristic Bata drums – not simply by use of the 6/8 feels
- The 6/8 clave pattern can also be played on the cowbell or ride cymbal for different textures and feels

Basic 3/2 Conga pattern:

2-3 SON CLAVE

CONGAS

H = HEEL
T = TOE
0 = OPEN

THE ESSENCE OF AFRO-CUBAN PERCUSSION & DRUM SET, ED UREÑA

Basic 2/3 conga pattern:

2-3 SON CLAVE

CONGAS

H = HEEL
T = TOE
0 = OPEN

THE ESSENCE OF AFRO-CUBAN PERCUSSION & DRUM SET, ED UREÑA

“Salsifying” your RS

1. **THE CLAVE!!!** Have an auxiliary percussion player play the Clave pattern on a Wood Block or simply clap the rhythm
2. The auxiliary percussionist may switch to another (appropriate) auxiliary percussion part whenever the drummer takes over the clave “duties”
3. Enter the conga “tumbao”... (Important: the 1st and 2nd measures in the second excerpt are reversed to fit with the Clave. (The right hand “open” hit should coincide with the 2nd and 3rd notes of the “3” clave measure)

Adding the Bass

1. Harmonic factors: Needs to establish Root/Fifth of each chord
2. The “salsa” bass line is often difficult for younger players due to syncopation/ties.
3. Try starting with a simplified version and then progress to final form
4. ***Try starting with a simplified version without the ties.***
5. The final form should be the **targeted goal** for an authentic performance
6. Once bass line is mastered, passing tones /rhythmic variations can be added.
- 7.

2-3 SON CLAVE "CASCARA" PATTERN

S.O. CROSS STICK SMALL TOM

BASS DRUM HI-HAT

(S.O. - SNARES OFF FOR TIMBALES SOUND)

or

3-2 SON CLAVE "CASCAADA" PATTERN

S.O. CROSS STICK SMALL TOM

BASS DRUM HI-HAT

(S.O. - SNARES OFF FOR TIMBALES SOUND)

Adding the drum set

1. This groove better suited for more subdued sections (head, solo beginning, etc)
2. Later on the Hi-Hat can also do the clave- freeing up your auxiliary percussionist to incorporate other appropriate rhythms
3. This example is only **one** of many **basic** patterns

SALSA $\text{d} = 200$

PIANO (L/R)

C:mi

$\text{B}^{\flat}\text{7}$

Basic piano pattern “with octaves added”

SALSA $\text{d} = 200$

PIANO

C:mi

$\text{B}^{\flat}\text{7}$

Basic piano pattern “with both hands”

SALSA $\text{d} = 200$

C:mi

$\text{B}^{\flat}\text{7}$

Adding the piano “montuno”

1. Piano pattern should be played rhythmically
2. Note that the rhythm is slightly adjusted according to clave

Other instruments

2/3 CLAVE

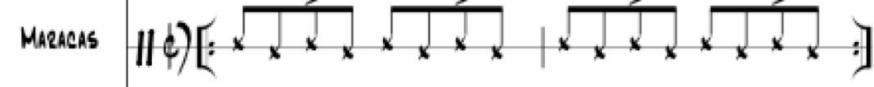
TIMBALES



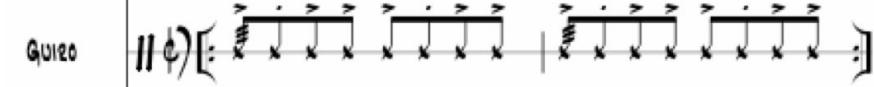
BONGOS



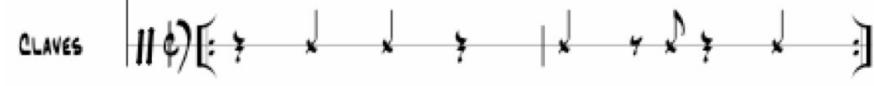
MARACAS



GUIRO



CLAVES



Recommended Discography

1. **Irakere** Irakere en Vivo Bailando Asi Irakere
2. **El Gran Combo** 25th Anniversary Mejor Que Nunca
3. **Grupo Niche** Grandes Exitos
4. **Eddie Palmieri** Azucar Pa Ti Sentido
5. **Paquito de Rivera** 40 years of Cuban Jam Session Manhattan Burn
6. **Tito Puente** El Rey; Para Los Rumberos Salsa Meets Jazz
7. **Celia Cruz** Exitos; Canta Celia Cruz Homenaje a Beny More
8. **Ray Barretto** Que Viva la Musica Ritmo de la Vida
9. **Ruben Blades** Caminando Buscando America
10. **Oscar de Leon** La Salsa Yo Soy Con Bajo y Todo
11. **Willie Colon** La Gran Fuga; There Goes the Neighborhood
12. **Los Van Van** Songo
13. **Arturo Sandoval** El Tren Latino
14. **Arsenio Rodriguez** Sabroso y Caliente
15. **Israel “Cachao” Lopez** Maestro de Maestros; Descargas con el Ritmo de Cachao
16. **Machito** Afro-Cuban Jazz Latin Soul Plus Jazz
17. **Jerry Gonzalez** Rumba Para Monk River is Deep