

# Afro-Cuban Rhythms For Drumset



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## Introduction

Welcome to Afro-Cuban rhythms for drumset. The next few pages will give a pretty extensive idea of how to apply afrocuban rhythms to a western drumset. You will find music scores and music samples throughout this website and you will need to download and install the free Real player(link provided in chapter 1)before continuing. This is my first website and it is a non-profit enterprise, it gave me the chance to learn a bit more about html and also to share what I know about these wonderful rhythms.

## History of Afro-Cuban Rhythms

Through history as people have migrated around the world their culture, including their music, has mixed with that of others to create new musical forms. In the United States, South America, and the Caribbean, the influence of African rhythms is particularly strong. Rock, R&B, jazz (United States), bossa nova, samba (Brazil), salsa (Cuba, Puerto Rico, New York City), reaggae (Jamaica) and calypso (Trinidad) all have African rhythms origins. To account for this, we must look at the common history of the regions where these forms first began to develop. The islands of the West Indies were among the first areas of the New World to be colonized by the great European powers--Spain, Portugal, England and France. Originally inhabited by various Indian tribes, they were over in a manner that is by now well-known: Indian populations were enslaved or eliminated until the Europeans gained control of the areas they wanted and began exploiting agricultural and mineral wealth. To turn such "undeveloped" lands into moneymaking enterprises required huge amounts of cheap labor. In those days in the Americas, that need was filled by the African slave trade. Slavery brought hundreds of thousands of Africans to the Caribbean islands, South America, and the United States. Most came from West Africa, though many were also taken from central Africa, the region now known as Zaire. Portugal shipped slaves from its colonies Mozambique and Angola in southern Africa to its New World settlement, Brazil.

From the 17th to the 20th century in the colonized regions, Europeans, Africans, and what was left of the Indian populations came together in an immense blending of race, language, religion, social customs---and of course, music. Drumming is an integral part of everyday life in Africa, and the traditions from there were carried on in the Caribbean and Brazil. Music and dance are central in these societies to religious and social ritual, communication, and entertainment. Drums are believed to have spiritual power, power to heal, to "speak", to tap natural forces and affect human energy and emotion. The styles mentioned earlier all use African rhythms and European-derived melodies, and instruments from both cultures.

In Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, the mixture of African rhythms and Spanish music led to new forms which have recently come to be called **Afro-Caribbean music**. Since the majority of the rhythms discussed in

this book are from the Cuban musical tradition, we will be using the term "Afro-Cuban." A closer look at the regions mentioned will help to explain the evolution of this music.

## Cuba

The name Cuba comes from the Indian word **cubanacan**, meaning "center place." It is the largest island in the Caribbean. Cuba's first inhabitants were Indians of two tribes, the Tainos and Caribs. Both were all but annihilated by the Spanish, although traces of Taino culture remained. Under Spain, Cuba became the most profitable sugar-production region of the world. Sugar was an enormously valuable commodity in the 17th and 18th centuries; individual fortunes and national economies were founded on the sugar trade. Thousands of African slaves were brought in to work the vast cane plantations. These slaves were controlled by the Spanish in various ways. Among other things, they were forced to speak Spanish and to accept Christianity. In defiance, slaves gave their African gods the names of Christian saints and continued to worship them in their native languages. This form of worship, known as **Santeria**, preserved many African religious, ritual and musical traditions, and is still practised today. Santeria is the Yoruba religion from Nigeria, as it has survived in Cuba. In its ceremonies we can hear West African rhythms in their nearly-original state. The hourglass-shaped **bata** drum is used in Santeria to contact the **orichas** (deities believed to represent and control the forces of nature).

The merging of African and Spanish influences resulted in many new forms; one of the most important is the **son**. Son is the root of most familiar styles of Afro-Cuban dance music. It is believed to have originated in Oriente, the eastern province of Cuba, toward the end of the 19th century, and was a blend of the music of the **campesinos**, or farmers of Spanish descent, and the African slaves (slavery was not abolished in Cuba until 1878). It was played by small bands, using guitars or **tres** (a guitar-like instrument with 3 sets of strings) from the Spanish tradition; **maracas**, **guiro**, **claves** and **bongos** for rhythm; and for the bass parts, a **marimbula** or African "thumb piano" (a large version of the kalimba) which the player sat upon, and the **botija**, a clay jug with a hole into which the player blew to produce low notes. By the turn of the century, son was being played in Havana, taking on a more urban character and growing more and more popular, finally becoming a national style in the 1920s.

The best-known son band of the '20s was the Sexteto Habanero. This group replaced the marimbula and botija with the string bass and added the trumpet. The Septeto Nacional of Ignacio Piniero in the late '20s carried these innovations further: their tighter sound, faster tempos, and simpler rhythms emphasized the Spanish aspect of son more than the African, while the trumpet added a distinctly urban flavour.

Son was revolutionized in the late '30s by Arsenio Rodriguez, the great blind Cuban tres player. By enlarging the son **conjunto** (band) to include **tumbadora** (conga drum), cowbell, piano, and two additional trumpets, he brought much of the original African influence back into son while at the same time expanding on the form. Rodriguez modified son in a number of important ways. The **estribillo** section (a vamp using call-and-response) became a full-blown **montuno** or **mambo** section, with heavy rhythms to back up solos; this later gave rise to the dance we know as the mambo. There was greater use of and adherence to the clave rhythm throughout the music. **Tumbao** was developed, repeating

phrases played by the bass and conga. The **guaguanco**, Cuba's most popular rumba form, was worked into the son style, and the tres became more important as a solo instrument.

The Cuban son would provide the basis for the Latin jazz styles of the 1940s, the popular dance orchestras of Machito, Tito Puente and Tito Rodriguez in the '50s, and the tipico and salsa bands that began in the '60s and continue to the present. In addition, such great musicians as Chano Pozo, Celia Cruz, Mongo Santamaria, and "Patato" Valdez helped bring Cuban styles to a place of international importance.

Other styles of music were popular in Cuba while son was developing. Most of this was dance music of European descent which was played by small versions of European orchestras. These groups, known as **orquestas tipicas**, performed the dance music fashionable with the Cuban upper class of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such dances as the **habanera**, **ritmo de tango** and **contradanza** were well-known in Cuba; the **danzon**, a 19th-century variation on the contradanza, was also a favourite, and in its later forms was very influential upon Cuban popular music.

Smaller versions of the orquestas tipicas, called **charangas**, also grew out of the contradanza tradition. Using violins, piano, flute, upright bass, **guiro** and **timbales** (a Latin adaptation of European kettle-drums), the charanga became a basic component of Cuban music. Charangas of the 1950s developed and popularized the **cha-cha-cha**, one of the many Latin "dance crazes" of the post-war era.

# CHAPTER 1

## Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel, Bembe:

Some of the fundamental rhythms in West Africa are based on 6/8 feels. In Cuba, one popular 6/8 feel is known as **bembe**, originating from the world *bembes*, which are religious gatherings that include drumming, singing and dancing. Let's listen to an example of the Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel played in a folkloric setting. This example is played on a *hoe blade*, *shekeres* (hollowed-out gourds with beads loosely wrapped around them), and *conga drums*(tumbadoras). This feel, played in Cuba, is completely African in style and instrumentation. Similar rhythms are heard throughout West Africa, especially in Nigeria (the Yoruba tribes) where much of the African population in Cuba originated. You'll hear the entire feel, and then each instrument solo, to show how the individual parts interlock.

## Afro-cuban 6/8 feel (Bembe):

The image displays four staves of musical notation for the Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel (Bembe). Each staff is in 4/4 time with a common time signature. The notation uses vertical stems with horizontal dashes to indicate rhythmic values. The first staff, labeled "Hoe Blade", shows a pattern of eighth notes. The second staff, labeled "High Drum", shows a pattern of eighth notes with "x" and "•" markings below the staff. The third staff, labeled "Middle Drum", shows a pattern with "(X)" markings. The fourth staff, labeled "Low Drum", shows a pattern with "(X)" markings. Below the High Drum staff, there is a legend: "• = open tone" and "x = slap". Below the Middle Drum staff, there is a note: "(X) = bass note with palm down on drum".

Shekere 1

> = hitting the base of the shekere

Shekere 2

### 6/8 CLAVE PATTERN:

It's essential to understand the importance of **clave** in Afro-Cuban music. Clave is a Spanish word meaning "key". The clave is the key to the rhythm being played, serving as skeletal rhythmic figure around which the different drums and percussion instruments are played. Any rhythmic figure can serve as a clave. We will be using what have become the most popular and important claves in African and Afro-Cuban music.

The clave rhythm is typically played on an instrument called **claves**, two round, solid pieces of wood which are struck one against the other. Clave figures can also be played by clapping your hands, hitting your drumsticks together, playing a cross stick on the snare drum or striking the side of the floor tom. Claves are used in Afro-Cuban folkloric and dance music, but are not usually played in Afro-Cuban 6/8 feels. We are playing the 6/8 clave only to show how it relates to the 6/8 cowbell pattern.

### 6/8 clave counted in 6/8 time:

$\frac{6}{8}$  Clave

6/8 clave in 4/4 time, with triplets:

6  
8 Clave

HH

Now play quarter-notes on the hi-hat with your foot along with the 6/8 clave figure, while counting eight-note triplets. 6/8 clave counted in 4/4 time with hi-hat on quarter-notes:

6  
8 Clave

HH

The 6/8 cowbell pattern corresponding to the 6/8 clave sounds like this:

6  
8 Clave

Cowbell

HH

Playing quarter notes on the hi-hat helps lock in the bell pattern. Notice that this pattern is actually the clave figure with pickup notes before the third note and the first note of the clave pattern. Again, the clave is *not* traditionally played in 6/8, we're only showing how the 6/8 clave relates to the 6/8 cowbell pattern. Here:

>  
3 >  
3 >  
3 >  
3

HH

With the hi-hat playing the quarter notes, try playing the cowbell figure with your right hand, while your left hand plays the clave pattern:

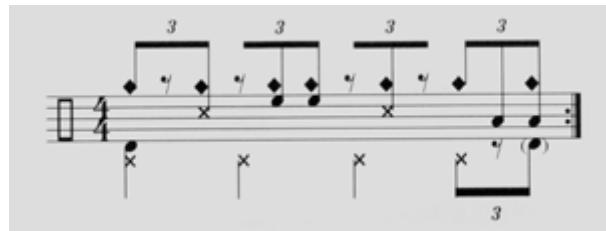
### Adding the bass drum:

Now play the bass drum on beat 1, with an optional pickup on the last triplet note of "4":

We can also play the bass drum with a kind of "2 feel". Play the bass drum on beats 1 and 3, with optional notes on the second triplet of "3" and the last triplet note of "4". The two optional notes give more of a swing, and feeling of forward motion to the rhythm. Here:

The toms on the drum set can imitate some of the basic conga parts that can be played to this Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel. Here:

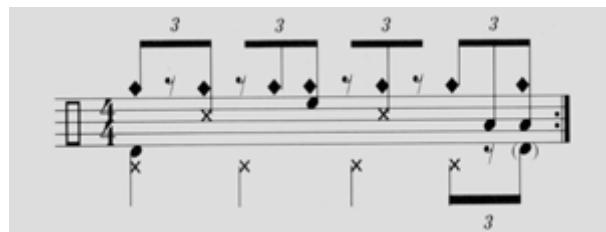
Let's put it all together. Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel with full drumset:



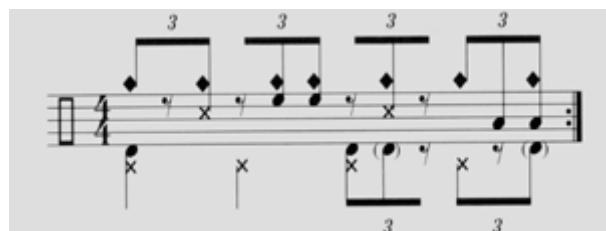
### IDEAS:

The cowbell pattern can be played on the side of the floor tom for a wood sound, or played on the hi-hat imitating the shekere. If you play the cowbell pattern on the hi-hat, don't play quarter-notes on the hi-hat with your foot. Also try the cowbell pattern on the ride cymbal for a jazz or fusion feel. Try leaving out the first note on the small tom. Now, the first note that you play on the tom falls on the clave pattern, making the rhythm more syncopated. At faster tempos this works well, it's less cluttered and swings harder.

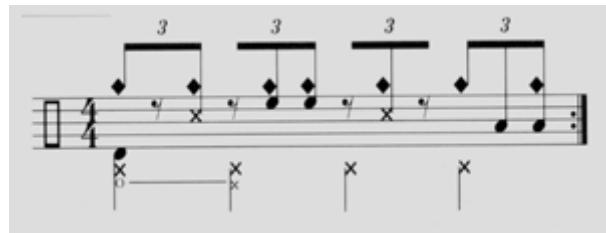
Leaving out the first note of the small tom, listen:



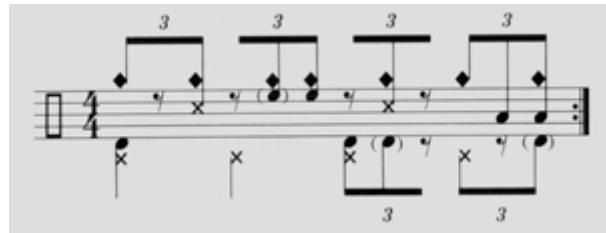
You can use bass drum figure 2 with optional pick up notes, to create a "2 feel", dividing the measure in half. Using bass drum figure 2, listen:



Opening the hi-hat with your foot on beat 1 of each measure will create a stronger feeling of downbeat, which is an important anchor for the 6/8 pattern. With hi-hat open on "1", listen:

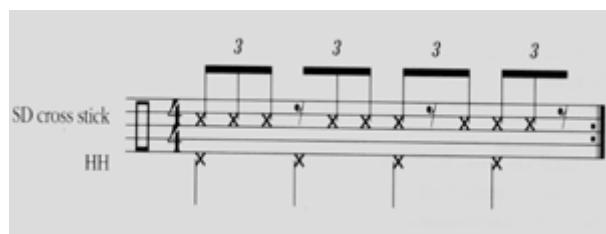


Let's hear the Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel played at a faster tempo. Listen to how the variations in bass drum and small tom parts change the feel. This 6/8 feel has a different "swing" to it at a faster tempo. Once you've learned the basic pattern, try at different tempos and notice the differences. Faster Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel with full drum set and variations, listen:

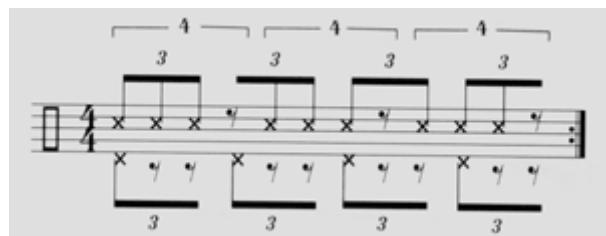


### Polyrhythmic 6/8 pattern, Abakwa pattern:

A **polyrhythm** is created when one rhythm is played over another. As you may have noticed, many polyrhythms are being played simultaneously in the Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel; different groupings are being played at the same time, against or over each other. An important polyrhythm, "4 over 3", is also played in a different Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel than bembe. This is played traditionally by the **Abakwa**, a secret male society in Cuba. This rhythm is usually played with sticks on a wooden surface or on the side of a drum, or incorporated into one of the conga parts. The 6/8 cowbell pattern played in the bembe feel is not played with this pattern. The pattern looks and sounds like this:



Notice that these are groupings of three triplet notes with a triplet rest, adding up to a grouping of four, played over the underlying triplet rhythm(groupings of three), creating the polyrhythm 4 over 3.



A full drumset adaptation sounds like this:

This polyrhythm can be played against the basic Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel, with a percussionist or another drumset player playing bembe, although this is not done traditionally with this pattern. This polyrhythm is also heard in the soloing played over different 6/8 feels, including bembe. It can also be heard in the jazz playing of Art Blakey, Elvin Jones and many others, reaching back to the West African 6/8 feel.

### Soloing:

In traditional settings in West Africa and Cuba, a soloist will play over the 6/8 rhythm. In West Africa, a "master drummer" will lead the ensemble, "calling" the rhythms, telling when to start and stop, which rhythms to play and at what tempos, etc. He will also solo over the rhythm. Since this music is traditionally played to accompany dancing in both secular and religious settings, the master drummer's soloing will correspond to the improvisations of different solo dancers which is an important tradition in West African music. Soloing is really "speaking" as if one were telling a story. Listen to the first 6/8 sample at the beginning of chapter 1. Notice how it sometimes follow the clave and other times plays against the clave(creating polyrhythms). Notice also how some of the solo phrases stretch and play with the time, and that many of them end with a strong "1", in the style of the Afro-Cuban and West African 6/8 feels.

## Afro-Cuban 6/8 patterns with backbeats:

If we put a snare drum backbeat on beat 3, we have a half-time feel similar to that played in fusion music, the style that mixes jazz, R&B, funk, and Latin. Playing the 6/8 cowbell figure on the hi-hat takes the rhythm away from a more Afro-Cuban and West African sound and closer to a fusion or funk style. This feel is also heard in African popular music. The 6/8 pattern can also be played on the cowbell or ride cymbal for different textures and feels.

Different pattern with backbeat on "3" ..

1. Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel with backbeat on "3", listen:

Drum notation for Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel with backbeat on "3". The pattern includes HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The backbeat is on the third beat of each measure.

2. Pattern 2, Snare drum on "3", listen:

Drum notation for Pattern 2, Snare drum on "3". The pattern includes HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The backbeat is on the third beat of each measure.

3. Ride cymbal with hi-hat on "3", listen:

Drum notation for Ride cymbal with hi-hat on "3". The pattern includes RC (Ride Cymbal), SD (Snare Drum), BD (Bass Drum), and HH (Hi-Hat). The backbeat is on the third beat of each measure.

In the following exercises the hi-hat patterns can be played two different ways:  
(1) The right hand plays the bell pattern, while the left hand plays the unaccented notes and snare drum backbeat: -

(2) Playing hand to hand with the bell pattern accented by whichever hand the pattern falls on. In this example the right hand plays the snare drum backbeat: -

The second way is popular in the African pop feels because of the even, constant feel on the hi-hat. Let's try some different bass drum variations. Bass drum variation 1, [listen](#):

Opening the hi-hat on the last triplet note of "1" gives more drive to the rhythm. Try this alternating pattern, [listen](#):

Notice the difference in syncopation versus straight quarter-notes. You can still open the hi-hat on the last triplet note of "1" over the straighter bass drum figure. Try it without opening the hi-hat at all for a different feel. Try leaving the bass drum off the first beat of the second measure, listen:

For a more syncopated feel, the bass drum and hi-hat (open) play an eighth-note earlier.

Here is another two-bar pattern, listen:

Now try the bass drum on all quarter notes. This is heard in popular music throughout Eastern, Southern and Central Africa, listen:

Now try backbeats on "2" and "4", listen:

Bass drum variations with backbeats on "2" and "4". Variation 1, listen:

Variation 2, listen:

The image shows a musical score for a right-hand technique exercise. It consists of four measures of music on a single staff. The first measure starts with a vertical bar labeled 'V' above it, followed by a '3' below the note heads. The second measure starts with a vertical bar labeled 'V' above it, followed by a '3' below the note heads. The third measure starts with a vertical bar labeled 'V' above it, followed by a '3' below the note heads. The fourth measure starts with a vertical bar labeled 'V' above it, followed by a '3' below the note heads. The notes are represented by vertical stems with horizontal dashes indicating pitch. The first three measures have six notes each, while the fourth measure has five notes.

Variation 3, listen:

Variation 4 is typical of pop music from Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, where the bass drum often plays quarter notes with different hi-hat and snare drum parts. West African pop music tends to use more syncopated drum parts. [Listen](#):

## Hi-Hat variations:

The hi-hat can be opened for a more syncopated feel. [Listen](#):

A musical score for a ride cymbal (RC) and bass drum (BD). The RC part consists of a series of vertical strokes with 'x' and 'o' markings, each followed by a '3' above it, indicating a triplet feel. The BD part has a continuous eighth-note pattern. The score is in 4/4 time.

## IDEAS:

The hi-hat pattern could be played on the ride cymbal during instrumental solos or louder musical sections. There's plenty of room for experimentation in blending the Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel with backbeats. Try playing the first backbeat on the last triplet note of "1" for an interesting syncopated feel.

## Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel in a jazz setting:

The jazz feel, an American rhythm with West African roots, is also based on triplets. [Listen](#) to this basic jazz feel:

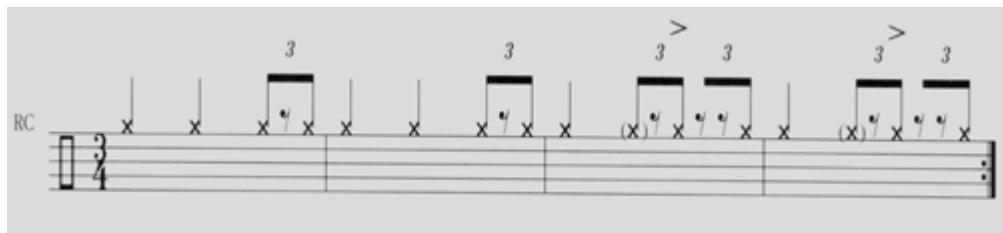
A musical score for a ride cymbal (RC) and bass drum (BD). The RC part has a pattern of vertical strokes with 'x' and 'o' markings, each followed by a '3' above it, indicating a triplet feel. The BD part has a continuous eighth-note pattern. The score is in 4/4 time.

Try playing 2 bars of 4/4 jazz feel, then 2 bars of Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel. Play both feels on the ride cymbal, with the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4. [Listen](#):

A musical score for a ride cymbal (RC) and bass drum (BD). The RC part has a complex pattern of vertical strokes with 'x' and 'o' markings, each followed by a '3' above it, indicating a triplet feel. The BD part has a continuous eighth-note pattern. The score is in 4/4 time.

Notice that the jazz pattern has more of an *upbeat* feeling, emphasizing beats 2 and 4, while the 6/8 pattern has more of a downbeat feel, emphasizing beats 1 and 3. Some jazz standards, like "Invitation", have come to be played with an Afro-Cuban 6/8 feel in the "A" section, while the "B" section "swings" in a jazz feel. Try to listen to recordings and performances where these feels are played together. Many variations are played on the 6/8 feel. Try to hear the relationship between the common origin of the Afro-Cuban 6/8 and jazz ride pattern.

Two important pulses in a 3/4 jazz feel sound like this:



The next example mixes a West African 6/8 feel with a 3/4 rolling triplet jazz feel. The toms are used in a way similar to the Afro-Cuban 6/8 pattern, listen:

This example shows how the 6/8 cowbell figure can be stretched out and "swung" over a new triplet setting. Playing on just the last note of the triplets pushes the rhythm forward, listen:

It has been said that all African and African-derived rhythms are actually in 6/8 time. What this means is that the 6/8 feel underlies the African-derived rhythms of Cuba, Brazil, the Caribbean, and the United States. Listen for phrases that sound like they're in 6/8.

Remember that in African and Afro-Cuban music the distinction is not sharply made between 6/8 and 4/4, as in Western music. African and Afro-Cuban rhythms are based on repeating phrases and figures and not on time signatures. I am using time signatures to adapt to adapt these rhythms to a form we are more familiar with.



## CHAPTER 2

### Clave in 4/4 time:

This clave in 4/4 is essentially the same pattern as the clave in 6/8, but phrased differently. For review here is the 6/8 clave figure counted in 6/8 time, [listen](#):

Musical notation for 6/8 clave in 6/8 time. The top staff shows a clave pattern with a '6' over '8' above it. The bottom staff shows a common time signature with a '6' over '8' above it.

Played over triplets in 4/4 time it looks and sounds like [this](#):

Musical notation for 6/8 clave in 4/4 time over triplets. The top staff shows a clave pattern with a '6' over '8' above it, followed by three sets of triplets. The bottom staff shows a common time signature with a '6' over '8' above it.

By changing the phrasing this same clave can be played in 4/4 time, using quarter and eighth-notes, [listen](#):

Musical notation for 6/8 clave in 4/4 time using quarter and eighth notes. The top staff shows a clave pattern with a 'Clave' label above it, followed by quarter and eighth notes. The bottom staff shows a common time signature with a '4' above it.

Although the previous example is written with eighth-notes and quarter-notes, there is no actual difference in the length or time value of the notes. It actually sounds more like this:

A musical staff with a common time signature (4/4). The first measure shows the clave pattern: a single vertical stroke followed by a pair of strokes (one vertical, one diagonal down-right) underlined. The second measure shows a single vertical stroke underlined, followed by a single vertical stroke and a single diagonal down-right stroke.

Although you will usually see this clave written in eighth-notes, you could also write it with sixteenth-notes:

Clave

Musical notation showing a clave pattern (two eighth notes followed by a sixteenth note) above a treble clef staff with four measures.

Try alternating two bars of clave in 6/8 with two bars of clave in 4/4. This exercise will help show the direct relationship between the two phrases. You can play 4,8 or 16 bars of each phrase, playing clave with a snare drum cross stick and hi-hat on quarter notes, listen:

## Rumba Clave:

This clave is called rumba clave because it is used in musical gatherings called *rumbas*. Rumbas are informal "get-togethers" combining African drumming and Spanish or African vocal traditions with improvised dancing and singing. Rumba also refers to the rhythms played at these gatherings. Although the rumba clave is counted in 4/4, it has a 6/8 feeling. Try to hear the 6/8 clave while you're playing in 4/4. This is the key to understanding rumba clave.

## 3-2, 2-3 Clave:

Looking at the two bar clave pattern in the next example you will notice that there are three notes in the first bar and two notes in the second bar. This is called *3-2 clave*. The first bar is called the 3-part of the clave and the second bar is called the 2-part of the clave. The 2-3 clave is simply the reverse, starting with the 2 part of the clave. Listen:

3-2 Rumba Clave

4

## Ideas:

As you have probably realized, once you're playing 3-2 or 2-3 clave, they sound alike. The only difference is where you call "1". Try playing 3-2 clave and without stopping, start counting 2-3 clave. By saying "1", you can mark where the phrase begins. This example will strengthen your internal feel of clave. Most Afro-Cuban music goes in and out of 3-2 and 2-3 clave, it's knowing where you are in the clave that is important.

Rumba clave is sometimes called *Cuban clave* because of its use in Cuban folkloric music. It is also sometimes called the *black clave*. Listen:

2-3 Rumba Clave

4

## Son clave:

Son is indigenous Cuban music combining African rhythms and Spanish harmonies. The *son* style laid the foundation for the popular Afro-Cuban dance music which emerged in Cuba, Puerto Rico and New York City. The son clave is named for its use in son music. This clave is the same as a very popular and prevalent clave found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. It differs from the rumba clave by only one note, which gives it an entirely different feel. The son clave has a much stronger feel of 4/4 while the rumba clave retains a stronger 6/8 feel.

Let's listen to an example of 3-2 clave:



Now try two phrases of rumba clave followed by two phrases of son clave, listen:

Rumba Clave

Musical notation for Rumba Clave. The top line shows a 3-2 clave pattern: a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth note tied to the next note; a quarter note followed by a sixteenth note and a sixteenth note tied to the next note; a quarter note followed by a sixteenth note and a sixteenth note tied to the next note. The bottom line shows a common time signature (C) with a 4/4 time signature symbol.

Son Clave

Musical notation for Son Clave. The top line shows a 3-2 clave pattern: a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth note tied to the next note; a quarter note followed by a sixteenth note and a sixteenth note tied to the next note; a quarter note followed by a sixteenth note and a sixteenth note tied to the next note. The bottom line shows a common time signature (C) with a 4/4 time signature symbol.



The son clave is sometimes called the salsa clave because of its use

in salsa, the nickname for the Afro-Cuban dance music developed by the Puerto Rican community in New York City. The next two example will show the 3-2 and 2-3.

3-2 Son Clave

2-3 Son Clave

### One-bar clave:

One of the most popular claves in the world is a one bar clave pattern. This clave is found in Africa, the Middle East, South America, Europe, the Caribbean and the United States. We'll look at the African (and Spanish) uses of this clave, since they are the components of Afro-Cuban music. An important drum played in the folkloric music called *conga* is the bombo drum. The bombo drum plays a one-bar clave figure, it muffles all notes except the second note of the rumba clave, which is played open and accented. Try playing the bombo pattern on your floor tom. Listen:

The basic part played by the upright or electric bass in Afro-Cuban music comes from the one-bar clave figure. It is usually played with a silent "1". Here is the same rhythm played on the bass drum

## CHAPTER 3

### Palito Patterns and Cascara:

For rumba, different stick patterns are played along with the clave. The sticks used are called palitos (little sticks). Traditionally, palito patterns are played on the *gua-gua* which is a mounted piece of bamboo with a resonant hollow sound. We will be playing the palito patterns on the rim of the floor tom. Most of the palito patterns are played with the rumba clave in the right hand and the rest of the pattern with your left hand. Let's start with the most popular palito pattern. Listen:

The clave figure within the palito pattern is not accented. The pattern should sound like one phrase with all notes at roughly the same volume. Think of the clave as you're playing and try to feel how the palito pattern falls on the clave. The clave is traditionally played by another person along with the palito patterns. Sometimes a near-flam is played between beat 3 of the second measure and the "and" of beat 3. Also, the pickup into the next phrase ("and" of beat 4) can be a little rushed, giving more of an edge to the rhythm. The hi-hat is included on "1" of each measure only as a reference and is not traditionally played.

The next example is another palito pattern that is often used. In this pattern the unaccented notes are played as ghost notes. Notice that this pattern breaks on the 2-part of the clave, giving a reference as to where the clave falls. Listen to the phrasing and again try to imitate it:

Our third palito pattern is also based on rumba clave. Remember, the clave within the palito pattern is not accented. Palito pattern 3:

A fourth variation on the basic palito pattern differs from the first palito pattern in that the first note of the second measure is played on the "and" of "1". Palito pattern 4:

### Cascara:

Cascara is the Spanish word for shell, referring to playing on the side or shell of the timbale. Cascara is played in salsa during verses and softer sections of music such as piano solos. On drum set we can imitate this technique on the side of the floor tom. The basic cascara pattern is the same as the basic palito pattern, except that it is played with one hand. The other hand (usually the left) plays a muffled tone on "2" and an open tone on "4" on the low timbale. Seeing timbales played live is the best way to understand how this works. As son music moved from the rural areas to the cities the instrumentation changed. Bongos, maracas and clave were played in early son bands. Arsenio Rodriguez, the great tres (a three stringed guitar-like instrument) player and band leader, was one of the first to use congas in his ensembles. Eventually timbales were added, creating a drum section of three drummers: a conguero playing congas, a bongocero playing bongos and handbell, and a timbalero playing timbales. Timbale is the Spanish word for timpani (orchestral kettle drums). The timbales were the Cuban adaptation of the larger European drums which were used in danzon orchestras. The danzon orchestras played music for the upper classes, most of which was refined dance music from Europe and the United States. From the danzon orchestras came charangas, which also played for upper class social gatherings. Timbales were used in charanga bands, and later congas were added. Timbales were eventually brought into the bands and orchestras playing son music, and have become an integral part of the salsa rhythm section as well.

Let's try eight bars of the basic palito pattern with two hands to eight bars of the cascara pattern with one hand:

3-2 Rumba Clave

Rim of FT    x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x ;

R L R L R R L L R L R R L R L R R L R ;

3-2 Rumba Clave

Side of FT    x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x ;

R R R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R ;

Cascara is not traditionally played to rumba clave but to son clave. We're playing it with rumba clave only to show how the cascara pattern is related to the rumba clave. Some of the modern bands in Cuba and New York are using cascara with rumba clave. Cascara played with right hand(3-2 rumba clave):

3-2 Rumba Clave

Side of FT    x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x ;

R R R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R ;

Try playing the cascara figure on the side of the floor tom while playing rumba clave with a cross stick on the snare drum. This is not a traditional pattern, but it is played by some current timbaleros, such as Nicky Marrero, and some modern bands in Cuba. Cascara in right hand, with 3-2 rumba clave in left hand:

3-2 Rumba Clave

Side of FT (RH)    x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x ;

SD cross stick (LH)    x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x | x x x x x x x x ;

We can play the cascara figure 2-3 by reversing the measures of the previous example:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Now play 2-3 rumba clave with a snare drum cross stick while playing the 2-3 cascara pattern on the side of the floor tom:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Let's see how cascara is traditionally played with son clave:

3-2 Son Clave

Now reverse the cascara pattern and try it with 2-3 son clave:

2-3 Son Clave

## Ideas:

Try the 3-2 cascara figure on the side of the floor tom and 3-2 son clave with a snare drum cross stick. After playing several 3-2 patterns without stopping, count "1" on the second bar of the pattern, changing it to a 2-3 pattern. After several 2-3 patterns go back to counting "1" at the beginning of the first bar. This is an important concept to learn because many charts for Afro-Cuban music will go in and out of 3-2 and 2-3 clave within the same song. All they are doing is starting figures and phrases on different parts of the same clave. To help feel the difference between rumba and son clave, let's try four bars of cascara with rumba clave going to four bars of cascara with son clave. Four bars of cascara with 3-2 rumba clave to four bars of cascara with 3-2 son clave:

3-2 Rumba Clave

3-2 Son Clave

Let's try the same exercise played 2-3:

2-3 Rumba Clave

2-3 Son clave

Let's listen to the basic conga drum pattern played in son music, called tumbao:

3-2 Son Clave

High conga: P S S O O S O O P S S S P S O O  
Low conga: L L R R R L R R L L R L L L R R  
1st x open (R) 1st x palm

Tumbao played to 2-3 son clave:

2-3 Son Clave

High conga: P S S S P S O O P S S O O S O O  
Low conga: L L R L L L R R L L R R R L L R R  
1st x only (O) (R)

Until recently, Afro-Cuban dance music did not involve drumset. In adapting traditional rhythms played in son music to the drumset, we can look to the timbales. Let's listen to timbales played with a conga player. Notice the metallic sound of the timbale shell. Timbale sticks are untapered, without tips and narrower than drum sticks. They are played with matched grip. The right hand plays cascara on the side of the timbale while the palm of the left hand plays muffled and open tones on the lower of the two timbales. This complements the tumbao figure with a single note on "4" instead of two notes. The ruff and rim shot that opens the rhythm is called **abanico**, meaning "fan". Abanico is used especially in 2-3 patterns. It can be played as a four-stroke ruff or five-stroke roll.

On timbales cascara with a conga player(3-2 son clave):

3-2 Son Clave

Side of timbale (RH): Cascara pattern (open/closed/closed/open)  
Low timbale (LH): Muffled tones (x) and Open tones (●)

x = muffled tone ● = open tone

And here with 2-3 son clave:

2-3 Son Clave

### Bombo note:

The second note of 3-2 clave is called the bombo note because the **bombo drum** played in the conga rhythm accented this note of the clave. The bombo note is accented in folkloric music (congas, rumbas, etc.) as well as the popular dance music styles (son music, mambos, etc.) In the bombo drum pattern all notes are muffled except the bombo note.

Let's try the cascara pattern with the bombo note played with the bass drum:

3-2 Son Clave

Side of FT  
ST  
SD cross stick  
BD

(SD - snares off for timbale sound)

And again with 2-3 clave:

2-3 Son Clave

When playing without a conga player you can add an extra tom note on the "and" of "4" imitating the tumbao pattern. Hear:

3-2 Son Clave

The bass drum can imitate the lower conga drum by playing two notes on the three part of the clave which answers the tumbao figure played on the higher conga. Let's try the same pattern played to 2-3 son clave:

A musical score for 2-3 Son Clave. It features two staves. The top staff shows a 2-3 clave pattern with eighth and sixteenth note heads. The bottom staff shows a bass line with eighth and sixteenth note heads, along with a bass drum symbol. The time signature is 4/4 throughout.

Here's a syncopated cascara variation which is played in Cuba. This pattern uses only certain notes of the basic cascara pattern. Some bands in Cuba, such as Los Van Van, use this cascara variation.

Syncopated cascara:

Since the hi-hat is not part of the timbale set-up, it is of course not usually heard in Afro-Cuban music. Playing the hi-hat also tends to interrupt the syncopated flow of the cascara patterns. However, as a great independence exercise you could try playing the clave pattern with your left foot on the hi-hat. In fact, you can try playing clave with the hi-hat in many of the different sections of this site. But remember, the hi-hat is not a traditional sound in Afro-Cuban music, it is used more in African popular music, Calypso, Reggae, Brazilian music, jazz and rhythm and blues. The hi-hat can be played with the 6/8 feel, mozambique and songo, not in their traditional forms but more in the styles of funk and fusion.



## CHAPTER 4

### Bell Patterns:

The timbale set-up includes a *mambo bell* which is a long, wide, low-pitched bell, and a *cha cha* bell a small high-pitched bell. The mambo bell is used in many of the dance feels based on son music, especially **mambo**, which was made popular in Cuba in the late 1930's. The cha cha bell is used mostly in *cha-cha-cha*, which was a dance created by charanga orchestras in the 1950's.

### Mambo Bell Patterns:

In softer sections of dance music the cascara pattern is played on the side of the timbales. During louder sections the mambo bell is played. We will hear how both patterns work in the popular dance music based on son which includes mambo, and the New York style called salsa. The mambo bell is mounted on the timbales so that it lies perpendicular to the player. Played with timbale sticks, the stick strikes across the middle of the bell.

The most common mambo bell figure sounds like this:

The image shows musical notation for a Mambo Bell pattern. At the top, it says "2-3 Son Clave". Below that, there are two rows of notes. The top row consists of six notes: the first two are grouped by a brace and have "(>)" above them; the next two are grouped by a brace and have "(>>)" above them; the last two are grouped by a brace and have "(> >)" above them. The bottom row is labeled "Mambo Bell" and shows a stick hitting a bell on each of the six beats. The notation is in 4/4 time.

We have written the accented notes in parentheses because although the notes are accented it is important not to over accent them. We'll only write in the accents one time for the 2-3 and 3-2 patterns, but remember the accents are part of the mambo bell patterns. The son clave is the clave heard most often with mambo bell patterns. Notice how the mambo bell pattern synchronizes with the 2-part of the clave. This can be helpful in finding the clave pattern. Let's play the 2-3 son clave with a snare drum cross stick.

The image shows musical notation for a Mambo Bell pattern in 2-3 Son Clave. At the top, it says "2-3 Son Clave". Below that, there are two rows of notes. The top row consists of six notes: the first two are grouped by a brace and have "(>)" above them; the next two are grouped by a brace and have "(>>)" above them; the last two are grouped by a brace and have "(> >)" above them. The bottom row is labeled "Mambo Bell" and shows a stick hitting a bell on each of the six beats. The notation is in 4/4 time. Additionally, there is a snare drum part below the bell, indicated by "x" marks on the 2nd, 4th, and 6th beats of each measure.

It is difficult to place a cowbell on the drumset at the same angle used in the timbale set-up. Most cowbells that are mounted on the bass drum have the mouth of the bell pointing towards you. This will work fine, just play the patterns on the middle part of the bell, preferably with the butt end of the stick for a fuller sound. Let's try the mambo bell pattern played 3-2:

3-2 Son Clave

Mambo Bell

Now let's add the clave rhythm with the left hand. Notice the silent "1" in the bell part and how it relates to the clave:

3-2 Son Clave

Mambo Bell

Returning to the 2-3 pattern, with the left hand play a snare drum cross stick on "2", and a small tom on "4". The right hand plays the mambo bell pattern. This is what a timbalero would play, except that he would muffle beat 2 with the left hand instead of playing the rim. Mambo bell pattern 2-3, with a conga player:

2-3 Son Clave

As we saw before, when playing cascara on drumset with a conga player the bass drum can play the bombo note. Because this rhythm is derived from a timbale pattern, the hi-hat will not be used. Playing "2" and "4" on the hi-hat can sometimes work if you think of it as part of the guiro rhythm and not as backbeats. Again, listening to recording and live performances will help you learn the right phrasing. When playing without a conga player, you can play the conga part on the small tom. The bass drum can play the notes shown in the second measure imitating the lower conga part.

Let's try the mambo bell pattern (2-3) without a conga player:

2-3 Son Clave

Now we will hear the same patterns played to 3-2 clave:

3-2 Son Clave

Mambo Bell  
ST SD Rim BD

If there is no conga player, you can play the conga part on the small tom:

3-2 Son Clave

Here are some other mambo bell patterns that can be played as variations for mambo and related dance feels. These patterns can be played 3-2 or 2-3. Many of these patterns work well for conga, bongo or instrumental solos.

Mambo bell variations:

3-2 Son Clave

Mambo bell

Cascara pattern

Staff 1: Mambo bell pattern

Staff 2: Cascara pattern

Staff 3: Cascara pattern

Staff 4: Cascara pattern

Staff 5: Cascara pattern

Staff 6: Cascara pattern

## Bongo Bell Patterns:

As well as playing bongos, the bongocero plays a cowbell called *campana* or *bongo bell*. This cowbell has a wider, thicker bell with a "fatter" lower sound. Played with a short, round piece of wood, the mouth and middle of the bell are played, producing two different sounds. The bongo bell is played in certain sections of son style dance music, along with the mambo bell. The bongo bell pattern adds drive to the rhythm and plays an important role in emphasizing the downbeat (played on the mouth of the bell). The basic bongo bell pattern is as follows:

Notice that on the 2-part of the clave only one note is played on the middle of the bell. This is your key to where the 2-part of the clave falls. This pattern can be played 3-2 by reversing the figure. Here:

Now we will play the bongo bell pattern on a mounted bell with the right hand and add the son clave with snare drum cross stick. We will use both 2-3 and 3-2 son clave:

## Bongo bell patterns with a conga player

You can play this pattern with the basic left hand timbale pattern that we used before with cascara and the mambo bell pattern.

Bongo bell pattern with a conga player(2-3 son clave):

2-3 Son Clave

ST (LH)

BD

Bongo bell pattern with a conga player (3-2 son clave):

3-2 Son Clave

BD

Bongo bell pattern without a conga player (2-3 son clave):

2-3 Son Clave

BD

Bongo bell pattern without a conga player (3-2 son clave):

3-2 Son Clave

BD

### Bongo bell variation:

2-3 Son Clave

Bongo Bell { middle mouth

This bell variation or the cascara pattern (on the middle part of the bell) are often played during timbale or conga solos.

### Mambo bell and Bongo bell patterns together:

Here's what the two bell patterns sound like played together. Notice where the patterns overlap and how they both fall on the clave. Listen for the 2-part of the clave where both patterns meet with the clave:

2-3 Son Clave

Mambo Bell

Bongo Bell { middle mouth

### Ideas:

You can try playing both patterns on two bells to build independence. The higher-pitched, thinner-sounding bell can play the mambo bell pattern while the lower-pitched, fatter-sounding bell plays the bongo bell pattern. You can try playing both bell parts on one bell. Certain cowbells have a wide mouth and a clear high-pitched body which allows you to play a combination of the two parts. On a mambo or bongo bell, playing both parts doesn't sound right. The mouth of the mambo bell is too thin and the body of the bongo bell is too low-sounding.

Here's a pattern which includes both mambo and bongo bell parts:

2-3 Son Clave

Cowbell { middle mouth

This is basically what one hears when both bells are played. This combination can get "busy" and works better at slower tempos.

## Cha-cha bell

The cha-cha-cha was a dance created by the charanga orchestras in Cuba in the early 1950's. Charanga orchestras were groups which played for the upper classes in Cuba, using piano, violins, flute, upright bass and timbales. These orchestras played European dance music and refined styles of Cuban dance music. The sound was less rhythmic than son music, which was more syncopated due to the influence of African rhythms. Congas were added later to charanga orchestras. Son orchestras also played the cha-cha feel using congas. Let's listen to the basic cha-cha feel. It is a straight quarter-note feel which is *not* played to clave. This is why it doesn't swing like the cascara or mambo bell patterns, which are syncopated and played to clave. You may sometimes see clave played to a cha-cha feel. It may be played by a singer who is used to playing clave on other dance feels, but this is not traditionally done. Remember, the cha-cha pattern doesn't fall on either side of the clave.

The instrument that you hear will be conga playing tumbao, cha-cha bell and small tom playing the timbale part, and guiro. Basic cha-cha feel:

Cha-Cha Bell ~

ST —

SD cross stick / 4

(SD—snares off for timbale sound)

Here is the guiro rhythm usually played for cha-cha:

Guiro

= scraping with no specific rhythmic subdivision of notes

## Hi-hat playing the guiro:

HH (RH)

1

2

This rhythm can be played on the hi-hat with either hand or the foot at slower tempos. You can play the basic cha-cha bell pattern with the right hand and the hi-hat guiro part with the left hand. Another possibility is reversing the hands, playing the cha-cha bell with the left hand and the right hand playing the hi-hat. In the next example, the hi-hat is playing part of the guiro rhythm with the foot. Notice that the eight-notes after beats 2 and 4 are not played.

Let's listen to the cha-cha feel played on drumset with a conga player:

The cha-cha bell pattern can be played on ride cymbal for more of a jazz feel. The ride cymbal figure can be played as straight quarter-notes or eighth-notes accenting the downbeats. Cha-cha feel without a conga player:



## CHAPTER 5

### RUMBA

#### Guaguancó:

**Rumba** is a form of folkloric drumming, singing and dancing which uses African rhythms, mostly Spanish vocal refrains, and African dance improvisations. The three most popular forms of rumba are **guaguancó**, **yambú** and **columbia**. Rumba columbia is played with a 6/8 feel and sung in a combination of Spanish and African phrases. Rumba yambú is traditionally played on different sized boxes which have been hollowed out( called cajones), and is sung in Spanish. Rumba guaguancó is the most popular rumba, especially in Puerto Rico and New York City. Guaguancó is played by a group that consists of three drummers, using congas of different sizes and tones. The three drums used are the **quinto**( the solo drum), **Salidor** (the timekeeper) and **tres golpes**(the accompaniment).

Quinto is the name of the high drum which solos over the rhythm and vocal vamps. Traditionally, the quinto is played to accompany dancers. The vocals are often improvised commentaries on people, the news, etc. The traditional instruments for guaguancó include clave, palito and congas. Rumba clave is usually played for guaguancó. Let's listen to an example of guaguancó played with clave, palito pattern, two congas and quinto drum. You will hear everything together, then each part separately so that you can see how it all fits together.

#### Guaguancó, folkloric feel at slow tempo:

#### Guaguancó, folkloric feel at faster tempo:

3-2 Rumba clave

Palito pattern basic

Low drum (salidor) played by one drummer, holding down the rhythm.

P S    P P    O    P S    P P    O  
L R    R L    R    L R    R L    R

Middle drum (tres golpes) answers the low drum (variations can be used)

S S P    S P S    O    S O    S P S  
R L R    L R L    R    L R    L R L

The quinto drum solos over the rhythm. Here is the quinto solo written out:

3-2 Rumba Clave

Staff 1: Measure 1: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note. Measure 2: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note.

Staff 2: Measure 1: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note. Measure 2: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note.

Staff 3: Measure 1: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note. Measure 2: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note.

Staff 4: Measure 1: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note. Measure 2: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note.

Staff 5: Measure 1: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note. Measure 2: Solid note, hollow note, solid note | Hollow note, solid note, hollow note.



Musical staff 2 consists of two measures. Measure 3 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest. Measure 4 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest.

Musical staff 3 consists of two measures. Measure 5 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest. Measure 6 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest.

Musical staff 4 consists of two measures. Measure 7 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest. Measure 8 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest.

Musical staff 5 consists of two measures. Measure 9 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest. Measure 10 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest.

Musical staff 6 consists of two measures. Measure 11 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest. Measure 12 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest.

Musical staff 7 consists of two measures. Measure 13 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest. Measure 14 features a sixteenth-note rest, followed by a sixteenth note, a sixteenth note, and a sixteenth-note rest.

## Guaguancó on congas

Here's the guaguancó figure which we just heard with two players, played by one conga player, as it would be in non-folkloric situations.

3-2 Rumba Clave

High conga      Low conga

R R L R L R L R R L R L R L

Basic conga melody

## Guaguancó on drumset

Let's adapt this to the drumset. We can play the floor tom and small tom imitating the conga melody, or substitute other toms depending on the tuning of your drums. The figures played around the basic guaguancó pattern are adaptations of the conga parts.

### Guaguancó figure on drums:

3-2 Rumba Clave

ST  
Cross stick (LH)  
Rim shot (RH)  
FT  
BD

(R) (L) = rim shot

The guaguancó figure we've been using is the most popular and well-known guaguancó figure. There are many other possibilities and variations. Basic guaguancó figure:

Basic guaguancó figure

Rumba Clave

FT

## Variation 1

## Variation 2

## Variation 3

## Variation 4

Variations 1-4 with all parts written in, notice how the accented snare drum notes answer the guaguanco figure:

3-2 Rumba Clave

ST SD FT BD

(sticking options) R L R L R L R L L R L R L R L L R L

R R L R L L R L L R R L R L R L R L L R L

Try playing clave with the right hand on the side of the floor tom while playing the basic guaguancó figure on the toms with the left hand:

You can try reversing the hands, playing clave with the left hand(snare drum across stick) and the guaguancó figure on the toms with the right hand. This will help you feel where the guaguancó figure falls on the clave. Notice that the active part of the clave(the high tom part) falls on the 2-part of the clave. This is called playing against the clave because the figure doesn't synchronize with the clave, but seems to go against it. One of the hardest parts of learning guaguancó is learning to feel it against the clave. This takes time so don't get discouraged. After plenty of listening and practicing this won't feel or sound so strange. The next example is the same as the last one but with reversed hands:

Now let's play the palito pattern on the side of the floor tom and the guaguancó figure on toms:

3-2 Rumba Clave

Side of FT (RH)

ST } (LH)

FT

BD

(Bombo note)

The palito pattern can be played on the bell of the ride cymbal for a different texture while the bass drum answers the guaguancó figure played on the toms. This can be used in jazz and fusion settings, [here](#):

3-2 Rumba Clave

RC bell

ST

FT

BD

You can try leaving out beat 1 in the bass drum part and just play the bombo note, making the rhythm more syncopated. The bombo note is an important accent played in the conga part, so be sure to accent it on the bass drum. When playing guaguancó with a conga player, the conga player will play the guaguancó figure against the clave and the drumset player can answer, playing the figure with the clave, [here](#):

3-2 Rumba Clave

Side of FT (RH)

ST } (LH)

FT

BD

In the guaguancó rhythm, the bombo note is set up by playing different figures. These figures are usually played on the solo(quinto drum). We'll play them with accents on the snare drum:

3-2 Rumba Clave

ST

SD

MT

FT

BD

(1)

R L R L R L L R L R L R L R L R L

L L R

(2)

L R L R L R L

(3)

R L R L R L R L

(4)

L R L R L R L R L

Different variations that can be played on drumset, for guaguancó. [Here](#) and [here](#).

3-2 Rumba Clave

(1)

R R L R L R R L

L R R L R R L

(2)

R L R R L R R L

(3)

R L R R L R R L



## CHAPTER 6

### CONGA

One of the most exciting times in Cuba is Carnival. Celebrated during the week before Lent, Carnival was originally a European festival. Today in Trinidad, Brazil, Haiti, Cuba and many other Caribbean and South American countries, Carnival has become a week-long celebration complete with continuous music, dancing, singing and costumes.

**Congas** refers to the musical rhythm as well as the dance that takes place in the streets of Cuba during Carnival time. The Carnival parade itself is called **comparsa**. In the comparsa, large ensembles of drummers, brass players, dancers and singers take to the streets for a frenzied celebration.

#### Conga, folkloric feel:

Let's listen to conga(the rhythm) as it is played traditionally in the comparsa. Conga is danced with a step backward on the bombo note. Notice how the rhythm falls on the rumba clave and how the bombo note is accented by the bombo drum. After we hear the rhythm, we'll isolate the different parts. In this case the high drum is called the salidor.

#### Full Conga rhythm:

Clave on handbell

Bombo drum

(accent on bombo note)

x = muffled note      ● = open note

O O      S S      O O      S S      O O  
R L      R L      R L      R L      R L

## Middle drum (rebajador)

O O M M O O P S S P S

L R R L R L R R L R R

M = muffled

## Low drum (conga)

P S S P S S P S S

R R L R L R L R R L

## Snare drum

R L R R L R L R L R R L

## Main bell

## Secondary bell 1

3 3

## Secondary bell 3

## Secondary bell 4

3 3

Secondary bell 5

### Conga, Snare and Bass drum patterns.

Let's try the snare drum pattern. We'll play the following patterns with 2-3 rumba clave. Check the audio example to help with phrasing:

2-3 Rumba Clave

SD

R L R R L R L      R L R R L R L

Now let's try the bombo drum pattern on the bass drum, accenting the bombo note:

BD

Bombo note

Next we will add the bombo drum pattern to the snare drum pattern. The snare drum and bombo drum parts should feel and sound like one part:

SD

BD

Conga, full drumset.

Here's a pattern for drumset that accents the bombo note on the floor tom:

2-3 Rumba Clave

SD  
FT  
BD

Here are some variations that you can use. These are similar to the setup figures for the bombo note we played in the section on guaguancó. Flams are optional. Try playing only one flam per measure:

2-3 Rumba Clave

SD  
FT  
BD

## Bell parts for Conga:

Here is another basic bell part for conga which you can play on cowbell:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell { middle mouth

The musical notation shows two measures of 2-3 Rumba Clave. The top staff consists of six notes: a breve, a eighth note, a eighth note, a breve, a eighth note, and a eighth note. The bottom staff shows a cowbell part with six strokes: three downward strokes followed by three upward strokes. The notation is in common time (indicated by a '4').

2-3 Rumba Clave

The musical notation shows two measures of 2-3 Rumba Clave. The top staff consists of six notes: a breve, a eighth note, a eighth note, a breve, a eighth note, and a eighth note. The bottom staff shows a cowbell part with six strokes: three downward strokes followed by three downward strokes. The notation is in common time (indicated by a '4').

Either of the two previous bell patterns will work fine as a basic or main bell part for conga.

## CHAPTER 7

### MOZAMBIQUE:

Adapted from the conga rhythm, has no specific relationship to the African nation of Mozambique, the name was probably coined as a catchword associating the music with Africa.

#### Mozambique on timbales:

The first example of mozambique is the basic mozambique timbale rhythm, played on drumset. Notice how the low timbale plays part of the bombo drum rhythm. The cha-cha bell figure is similar to the snare drum part played for conga.

#### Mozambique basic pattern:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cha-Cha Bell

MT

x = muffled note   ● = open note

Let's try adapting the mozambique pattern to the full drumset:

2-3 Rumba Clave

RC Bell

ST

SD

FT

BD

You can use different bass drum figures to set up the "and" of "4" on the snare drum. Listen to these bass drum variations for mozambique pattern on drumset in 2-3 rumba clave:

Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The top staff consists of two measures of eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff follows the same pattern in the second measure.

The next example is a variation that can be played with the mozambique pattern on drumset.

Here:

2-3 Rumba Clave. The notation shows a 2-3 clave pattern with eighth-note strokes. The first measure ends with a vertical bar and a bracket labeled "1st x only". The second measure begins with a vertical bar and a bracket labeled "2nd x". Below the notes, a drumstick pattern is shown with the letters L, R, L, R, L.

More variations on drumset:

1st variation. The notation shows a 2-3 clave pattern with eighth-note strokes. The first measure ends with a vertical bar and a bracket labeled "1st variation". The second measure begins with a vertical bar and a bracket. Below the notes, a drumstick pattern is shown with the letters L, R, L, R, L, R, R, L, R, L, R, L.

**Steve Gadd mozambique pattern:**

Steve Gadd plays a mozambique variation in some of his soloing. Let's see what he uses as a basic pattern:

Cowbell (RH) ST SD } (LH) BD HH. The notation shows a 2-3 clave pattern with eighth-note strokes. The first measure ends with a vertical bar and a bracket labeled "Cowbell (RH) ST SD } (LH)". The second measure begins with a vertical bar and a bracket. Below the notes, a drumstick pattern is shown with the letters BD, HH, BD, HH, BD, HH, BD, HH.

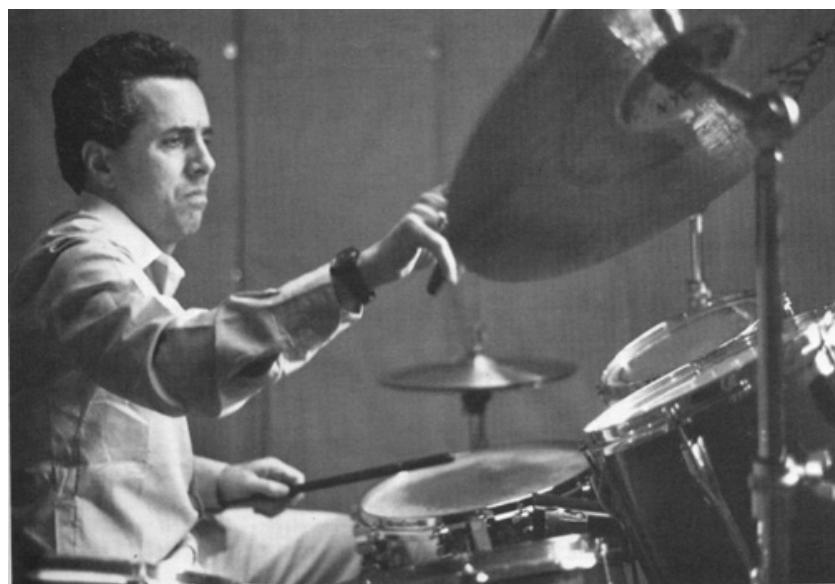
Here are a few variations to the basic mozambique pattern. The snare is played like a flam with the cowbell on beat 1:

Steve Gadd plays another mozambique variation using four sticks on "Late In The Evening" by Paul Simon. Next is a four bar mozambique pattern for two drumsets. The first drumset plays upbeats and syncopation while the second drumset plays more of a steady 16th-note pattern on the hi-hat.

First Drumset:

Second Drumset:

Listen to both drumsets together



## CHAPTER 8

### SONGO:

Now we come to a rhythm actually created for the drumset! Attributed to the great percussionist Changuito of the Cuban group Los Van Van, songo was adapted to the music of the 70's and 80's. Let's look at the basic pattern. Played with all rim sound, it sounds like a 2-3 palito pattern. Notice how the songo pattern falls on the clave.

The bass drum plays the bombo drum accent in each measure. Notice that the bass drum plays the accent in both measures over both parts of the clave (like the bombo drum and the low timbale in mozambique). Remember that with cascara, mambo and bongo bell pattern, and guaguancó, the bombo note was accented only in the 3rd part of the clave.

Basic songo pattern with two hands played to 2-3 rumba clave:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Side of FT (RH)

SD cross stick (LH)

BD

tacet 1st x

Basic songo pattern with right hand playing cowbell and left hand playing snare drum rim:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell (RH)

SD cross stick (LH)

BD

tacet 1st x

Notice how playing "1" and "3" on the cowbell changes the feel. This same contrast of downbeats and upbeats happens between the bongo bell(downbeats 1 and 3) and mambo bell(syncopated with lots of upbeats). The bass drum can play an optional note on "1" giving an added push to the rhythm, but if you play on "1" all the time it will interrupt the flow of the rhythm. Now let's move the left hand around to the different drums.

Basic songo pattern on full drumset:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell/HH

ST  
SD } LH

FT

BD

tacet 1st x

## Ideas:

With the right hand try playing hi-hat, ride cymbal or the side of the floor tom for different textures. In Cuba, different bells are played on each downbeat, creating an exciting feel with both hands constantly playing different sounds. The hi-hat (with the foot) can play on "1" and "3". Playing quarter notes tends to be too busy and playing on "2" and "4" clashes with the downbeat feel of the rhythm.

## Songo Variations:

Here's a variation on the basic songo pattern. This variation, also played by Changuito, adds variety and breaks up the basic pattern. Notice how it falls on the clave. You'll hear the basic songo pattern played once so you can hear how to go to the variation.

Basic songo pattern with variation:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell/HH  
ST  
SD LH  
FT  
BD

R L L R L R L R L L

At faster tempos you can play fewer notes with the left hand. The bass drum plays on "1" in the first measure and does not play in the second measure.

Songo pattern for faster tempos:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell/HH  
SD rim  
tacet 1st x

L RL L RL L

Here is a different songo pattern using the middle and floor tom. This pattern has a very different feel than the basic songo pattern. Notice that the middle tom is played with the right hand while the left hand plays "2" on the snare drum rim. The middle tom can be played on "2" without the snare drum rim (with the left hand), which will work better when playing faster tempos.

Songo pattern 2:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell/HH  
SD rim

R R R L R R R L R R L R L L R, L, R, L, L

Now let's try playing the middle tom on the "and" of "2". This makes the feel more syncopated. This variation will be difficult at first because playing the middle tom between the cowbell notes breaks the even "1" and "3" feel in the right hand.

Songo pattern 2 with syncopated middle tom figure:

2-3 Rumba Clave

SD cross stick

SD rim

R L R R      L R R | R L R P      L R L

Here is a songo pattern without an audio example:

2-3 Rumba Clave

Cowbell

SD cross stick

R L L R R L R L | R L P R L R L Rim /

Most songo patterns that we hear are played "2-3". The following is a "3-2" songo pattern for two drumsets. The first pattern can be played by itself or the second drumset can be added if there are two drummers. Notice that you are playing "3-2" rumba clave with a snare drum cross stick which is answered by the small tom and bass drum. The last measure is actually the first measure of the basic "2-3" songo pattern.

Drumset 1:

3-2 Rumba Clave

HH (RH)

ST  
cross  
stick

Drumset 2:

1st time only

HH

SD

tacet 1st x

R L R R      L R L R R | R L R L R L R R L R L

Both drumsets together, one on each channel.

Songo is one of the most adaptable Afro-Cuban rhythms. Playing downbeats on the cowbell, hi-hat or ride cymbal makes this rhythm fit in with pop, funk and fusion styles. Some of the best examples of bands playing songo are the Cuban bands Los Van Van, Afro-Cuba, Ritmo Orientale and Irakere.

## CHAPTER 9

### MERENGUE:

Even though it is not Afro-Cuban, merengue is an important rhythm with African roots. Merengue is a rhythm and dance from the Dominican Republic, the Spanish-speaking part of the island called Hispaniola. Haiti makes up the other part of the island and has a wonderful folkloric and popular dance music, including its own version of merengue. The basic merengue pattern traditionally has three parts or sections. The first section is called merengue, the second section is called jaleo, the third section which is sometimes referred to as the "swing section" is called apanpichao.

A double-headed drum, the tambora, plays an important part role in the merengue rhythm. The tambora is played sideways with both hands, one with a stick, the other without. Downbeats are played with the hand, while the stick plays the syncopation, both play different open drum figures. Congas are now used along with tambora in dance bands. A metal torpedo-shaped guiro, called guira, played with a metal scraper, is also used in merengue. Although clave is not played with merengue the rhythm fits over 3-2 clave.

### First Section: Merengue.

This pattern uses the floor tom, floor tom rim and snare drum cross-stick, playing the tambora patterns. The left hand (snare drum cross-stick) imitates what is played on one side of the tambora, while the right hand imitates what is played on the other hand and wood around the head.

First part of merengue rhythm, merengue pattern:

### Second Section: Jaleo.

Now let's hear the second part, called jaleo:

### Third Section: Apanpicho.

Last is the third part or swing section, called apanpicho. In this section, the bass goes from a "2" feel (playing on "1" and "3") to a syncopated bass line similar to that played in son music.

Third part of merengue rhythm, called apانpicho:

## Merengue, Full Drumset.

Merengue can be played on drumset. The bass drum usually plays downbeats, the hi-hat plays the guira part and the tambora(the jaleo pattern is most often used) is played on floor tom, floor rim and snare drum cross-stick.

## Merengue full drumset:

When you listen to merengue, notice that the bass will play in a "2" feel most of the time and will sometimes go to a syncopated feel like the basic pattern played in son music (usually on the third section, apanpicho).

### Merengue-Songo pattern.

Here's an interesting mixture of merengue and songo. Remember we said that merengue is basically a 3-2 pattern. This part of the apanicho pattern (on the 3rd part of the clave) mixed with the first bar of the basic songo pattern (over the 2nd part of the clave).

#### Merengue-Songo:

3-2 Son Clave

Cowbell/HH

tacet 1st x

R L      L R L      R L      R L R



# CHAPTER 10

The next two examples are patterns created for the drumset. These patterns are not based on any one rhythm, they are created from different Afro-Cuban rhythms.

## Irving Blues:

This next pattern uses phrases heard in bata drumming (the drumming of the Yoruba religion known as Santeria, which is practiced in Cuba and New York). This example is played on two drumsets because bata drumming involves three different-sized double-headed drums.

## Rumba Iyesa,

## First drumset:

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff shows a 2-3 Rumba Clave pattern with eighth and sixteenth note heads. The bottom staff, labeled "HH" (Hand Drum), shows a corresponding rhythmic pattern using "x" and "o" symbols. Both staves are set against a 4/4 time signature.

### Second drumset:

Both drumsets together.

## CHAPTER 11

### Medley of Playing examples:

The following section includes a medley of some of the rhythms we've covered. You'll hear 16 bars of each pattern with breaks in between. In the second example you'll hear only conga and clave so you can try the drumset part. Clave continues through the entire medley, changing phrasing in some of the different sections. Use the clave as a reference when going from one pattern to another. Use the chart for the drumset patterns and breaks.

First example, full instruments layout:

Second example, conga and clave only:

6 Clave  
8

Afro-Cuban 6/8 Play 8 SD (snare off)

2-3 Son Clave Cascara Play 16

2-3 Son Clave Mambo bell pattern Play 16 3-2 Rumba Clave

Guaguanco Play 16

conga 2-3 Rumba Clave Mozambique Play 16  
snares on

2-3 Rumba Clave  
Songo

Play 16

6 Clave

Afro-Cuban 6  
Play 3

crash