The Role of the Drum Set in the History and Development of Afro-Cuban Music

By

Alejandro Castaño

A thesis submitted to the
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Thesis title

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For a Master's Degree in Jazz Performance & Pedagogy

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Introduction

This research explores the drum set's role in the history and development of Afro-Cuban music. It aims to identify the essential aspects of Cuban rhythms that contribute to the authenticity of the country's national music, particularly in modern-day rhythm sections. The roots and branches of modern Cuban music are examined by focusing on these four key genres: rumba, son, danzón, and Afro-Cuban jazz styles. This thesis identifies the drum set's role in the history of Afro-Cuban music from the late 19th century to the present day. The drum set throughout the early history of Afro-Cuban music was mainly an adaptation of other Afro-Cuban percussion instruments until the 1970s when the most significant innovation occurred.

The emergence of the musical style songo, or “Son-go,” in the early 1970s marked a significant shift in how the drum set became integrated into traditional Afro-Cuban rhythm sections. Songo has also accelerated the evolution of the presence and acceptance of the drum set in modern Cuban ensembles. By tracing the roots of songo and more contemporary styles back to the roots of Cuban music, this study seeks to bridge the gap between the history and modern innovations of Cuban music, particularly as it relates to the role of the drum set.

Cuba's rich musical history dates back to the late 15th century when enslaved Africans were brought to Cuba and forced to work on sugar plantations. The cultural connection between European, Spanish, and African cultures in Cuba directly results from this transatlantic slave trade. Cuba received an influx of over one million African natives in the 300 years preceding Cuba’s abolition of slavery in 1873. The African

people were forced to Cuba by the Spanish settlers to work the gold mines and sugar and tobacco plantations, and as a result, their culture and traditions were transplanted to the island. The majority of the enslaved people were originally from what is today Nigeria, the Congo, and Angola. From this unique blend of origins, the enslaved people brought with them the rhythms, music, and dance that were an intrinsic part of their religious and social life back home. This resulted in a musical undertone to the culture that would develop over the course of Cuban history. The melding of African rhythms with the Spanish and French sense of melody gave birth to Cuba's wealth of music and dance. For this reason, the genre is most commonly referred to as Afro-Cuban.[1]

[1] Fernando Ortiz et al., *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2003).

The Clave

An essential element and distinct characteristic of Afro-Cuban music is the rhythmic pattern known as *clave*. This pattern is often played on the instrument known as claves. According to work done by the historian Fernando Ortiz, the origin of this instrument is from the docks of Havana. The wooden pegs used to repair ships were struck against each other to produce a clear, loud, and rhythmic sound. Clavijas is the Spanish name for these wooden pegs used in shipbuilding. As a result of their labor in shipbuilding, they discovered a distinct sound that is still used to this day.[2]

The clave rhythm has several different variations in Afro-Cuban music. The clave patterns used today are descendants of patterns from various African styles of sacred and secular music. There is a rhythmic cell that is used throughout many different African rhythmic styles that is now commonly known as the 6/8 Afro-bell (fig 1).[3]

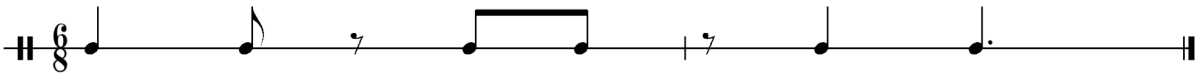

Figure 1. 6/8 Afro-bell

From this pattern, many of the Afro-Cuban clave patterns developed. In Cuba, this rhythm is used in *Batá* drumming traditions as well as in many other 6/8 rhythmic styles and was initially played on the *Guataca.* Guataca is a hoe blade that is struck with

[2] Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos De La música Afrocubana* (Habana: Dir. de Cultura del Ministerio de Educación, 1952).

[3] Ed Uribe, *The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drum Set: Rhythms, Songstyles, Techniques, Applications* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 2006), 35.

a large nail or metal spike and can be heard in styles such as bembé and rumba columbia.[4]

A clave pattern that is directly related to this 6/8 Afro-bell pattern is the *rumba clave.* The Abakuá music from the Nigerian Calabar tradition contains a pattern that is almost identical to the rumba clave.

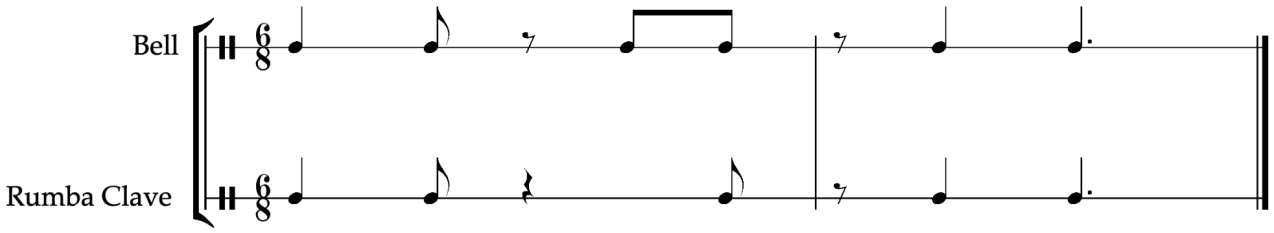

Figure 2. 6/8 Afro-bell and 6/8 rumba clave.

Figure 2 displays the development of the rumba clave by eliminating one of the notes of the bell pattern. This clave has its own characteristics and inflection depending on the rhythmic style. An alternative variation of the rumba clave involves adding a rhythmic inflection within a duple meter. Figures 3 and 3.1 demonstrate the difference between 6/8 rumba clave and the way rumba clave is felt in 4/4 time respectively.

Figure 3. 6/8 rumba clave.

Figure 3.1. Rumba clave in 4/4 time.

[4] Ed Uribe, *The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drum Set: Rhythms, Songstyles, Techniques, Applications* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 2006), 60.

The son clave is another type of clave variation that is played in duple meter. To better understand the clave and how to integrate it, musicians outside of Cuba began to describe the clave as either being 3:2 or 2:3. This divides the pattern into a three-side and a two-side.[5]

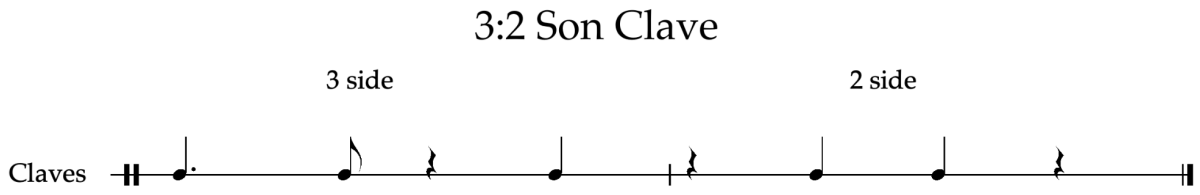

Figure 4. 3:2 son clave.

Figure 4.1. 2:3 Son Clave

The clave is felt throughout Afro-Cuban music and is a foundational element that musicians strive to assimilate. This enables them to imply the rhythm rather than be

[5] Dafnis Prieto, *A World of Rhythmic Possibilities: Drumming Lessons and Reflections on Rhythms* (New York: Dafnison Music, 2016), 18-19.

constrained by it. The significance of internalizing the clave lies in its ability to ingrain the music with a subtle yet discernible pulse, creating a sense of coherence and continuity that is inherent in Afro-Cuban music. The clave represents a distinctive aspect of this musical tradition. It embodies its rich cultural heritage and provides a unifying framework for its expressive and rhythmic diversity. In Afro-Cuban drum set, playing the clave rhythm is always felt; drummers can play it outright or alternatively integrate it into the actual groove in a more subtle manner.

Dafnis Prieto, world-renowned drummer, and percussionist, as well as professor of jazz Drum Set at the Frost School of Music in Miami, writes in his book, *A World of Rhythmic Possibilities,* "The Clave in Cuba"

> The clave in Cuba is and always has been played in an intuitive way. The clave has not been intellectualized, conceptualized, or compartmentalized by its starting point as it has been outside the island. Most Cubans in Cuba share the same instinctive knowledge about the Clave pattern, and so the clave is simply placed where it sounds good and where it feels to be right. Given the depth of its roots in Cuban culture, the clave pattern became almost a rhythmic instinct and a reaction without premeditation or conscious thought.[6]

[6] Dafnis Prieto, *A World of Rhythmic Possibilities* 20.

Rumba

The musical ensemble of the rumba consists of both a percussion and vocal section. The percussion section typically includes one or two low-pitched *conga* drums, a high-pitched conga drum known as the *quinto*, and a pair of wooden sticks called *palitos*. Palitos are struck against the wooden body of one of the drums. The vocal section is composed of a lead singer and a chorus. In both sections, there are two basic roles: the leader and the responder. These roles play a significant part in the structure of the rumba and enable a high degree of freedom and individuality for the lead singer and the quinto player. In rumba, the relationship between structure and freedom in the music contributes to a highly spontaneous and interactive atmosphere.

The true beauty of a rumba performance lies in the improvisation that takes place in the band. This makes each interpretation of rumba a unique experience. The majority of the improvisation comes from the quinto player and the singer, but the way the ensemble responds is distinct and original to each performance. A skilled *rumbero* possesses the ability to create diverse rhythmic and melodic relationships while adhering to the fundamental structure. The phrases of the lead singer and quinto player are improvised over the rhythmic style. Improvisation is an important aspect of Afro-Cuban music and is a part of all of the different styles.

The incorporation of improvisation in Afro-Cuban drum set playing is an essential element in achieving an authentic feel. The patterns and grooves played on the drum set constantly change and influence the music like any other Cuban percussion. This

can also be heard in other musical styles throughout the world and is one of the most important parts of jazz performance.

In Cuba, rumbas are typically performed at informal gatherings in neighborhood bars, tenement house patios, and street corners, for example. In its traditional setting, the rumba is a collective expression of the participants. The term itself comes from the Spanish word "rumbo," which means carousal or spree.[7] By the first quarter of the twentieth century, three dominant rumba types emerged: columbia, yambú, and guaguancó.

Figure 5 is an example of a rumba guaguancó. Rumba guaguancó is in duple meter and is performed at medium to fast tempos. The clave, palitos, and the bombo lay the foundation, while the two lower-pitched congas, the tres golpes and salidor, create the melody. The quinto, or the highest-pitched conga drum, does not play any specific pattern but instead improvises with the vocal passages and dancers.

[7] Crook, Larry. “A Musical Analysis of the Cuban Rumba.” Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana 3, no. 1 (1982): 92–123. https://doi.org/10.2307/780245.

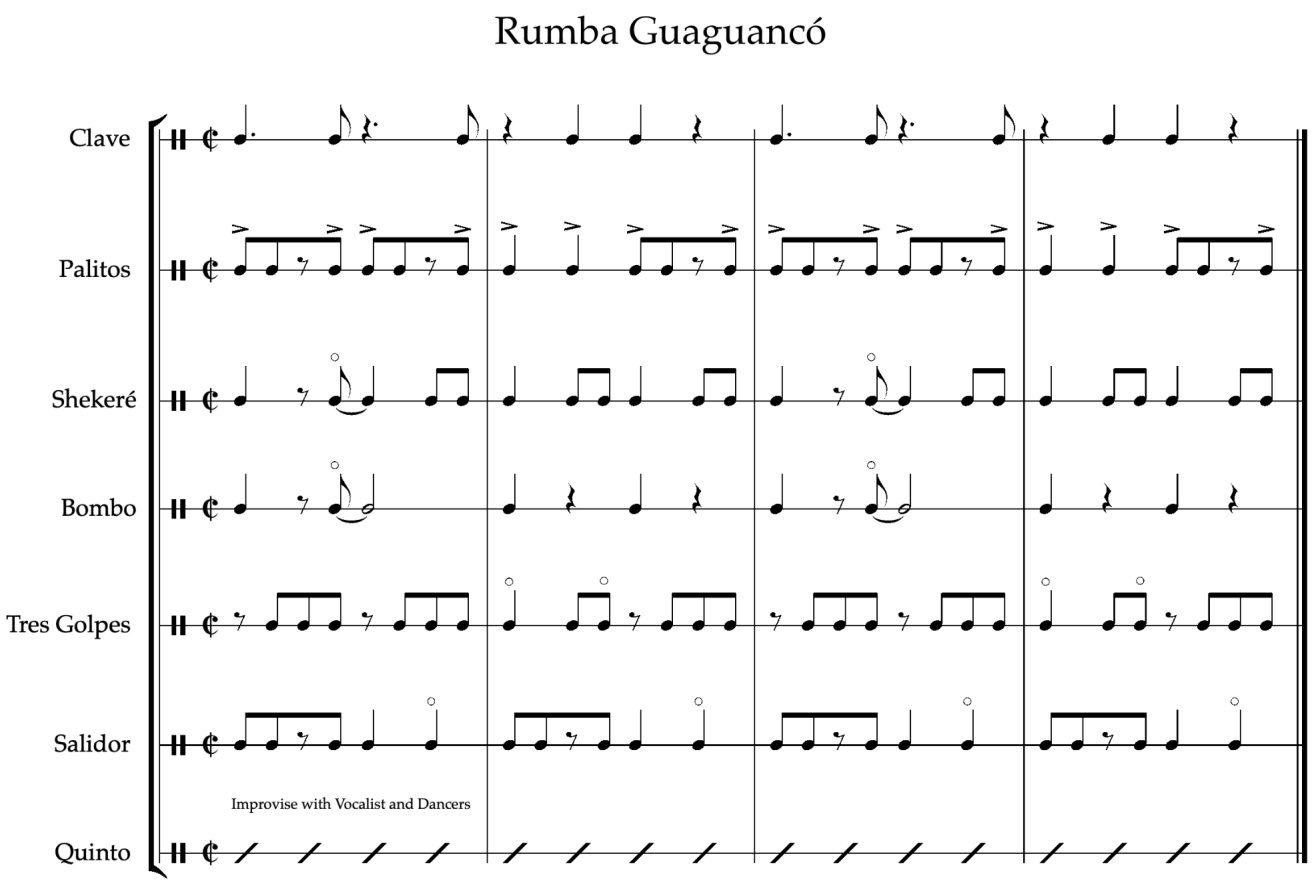

Figure 5. A basic example of rumba guaguancó

Son

In the words of Danilo Orozco, Doctor of Musicology at Humboldt University, “The roots of son are really elements and nutrients that flow into a process, and that process gives rise to a music that we now call son.” [8] Son began growing and developing throughout the end of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th century. It is said that son was born in the eastern part of Cuba known as Oriente, and that later the interaction between the rural and urban areas influenced the shape of the musical style.

Son is a foundational music style that has influenced numerous contemporary genres and is commonly recognized as the popular dance music of the working class. The music blends the lyrical and melodic elements of Spanish music with African-derived rhythms, harmonies, and instruments. The traditional instrumentation of son includes several African-derived instruments such as *bongó*, *maracas*, *güiro*, and claves. The *marímbula* and/or the *botija* provide the role of the bassline.[9] The *tres* Cubano, a small-scale guitar with three courses or three sets of doubled strings, is the hallmark instrument of the son. The lowest set of strings has two octaves of the note G followed by C and E in unison. In other words, the collection of notes found on the Tres forms a C major triad in second inversion, with the root G sounding an octave above. Its importance lies in its ability to create harmonies, melodies, and syncopated rhythms. Over time different instruments came in as an addition to the ensemble and to replace others. For instance, the double bass replaced the marímbula and the botija in their

[8] *100 Sones* , *YouTube*, 2020, https://youtu.be/SIGGqhHef-E.

[9] Mauleón Rebeca, *Salsa Guide Book for Piano and Ensemble* (Petaluma, CA: Sher Music, 1993), 177.

respective roles in the group. It is also common to see the guitar in early son groups, and piano and timbales are also used later.

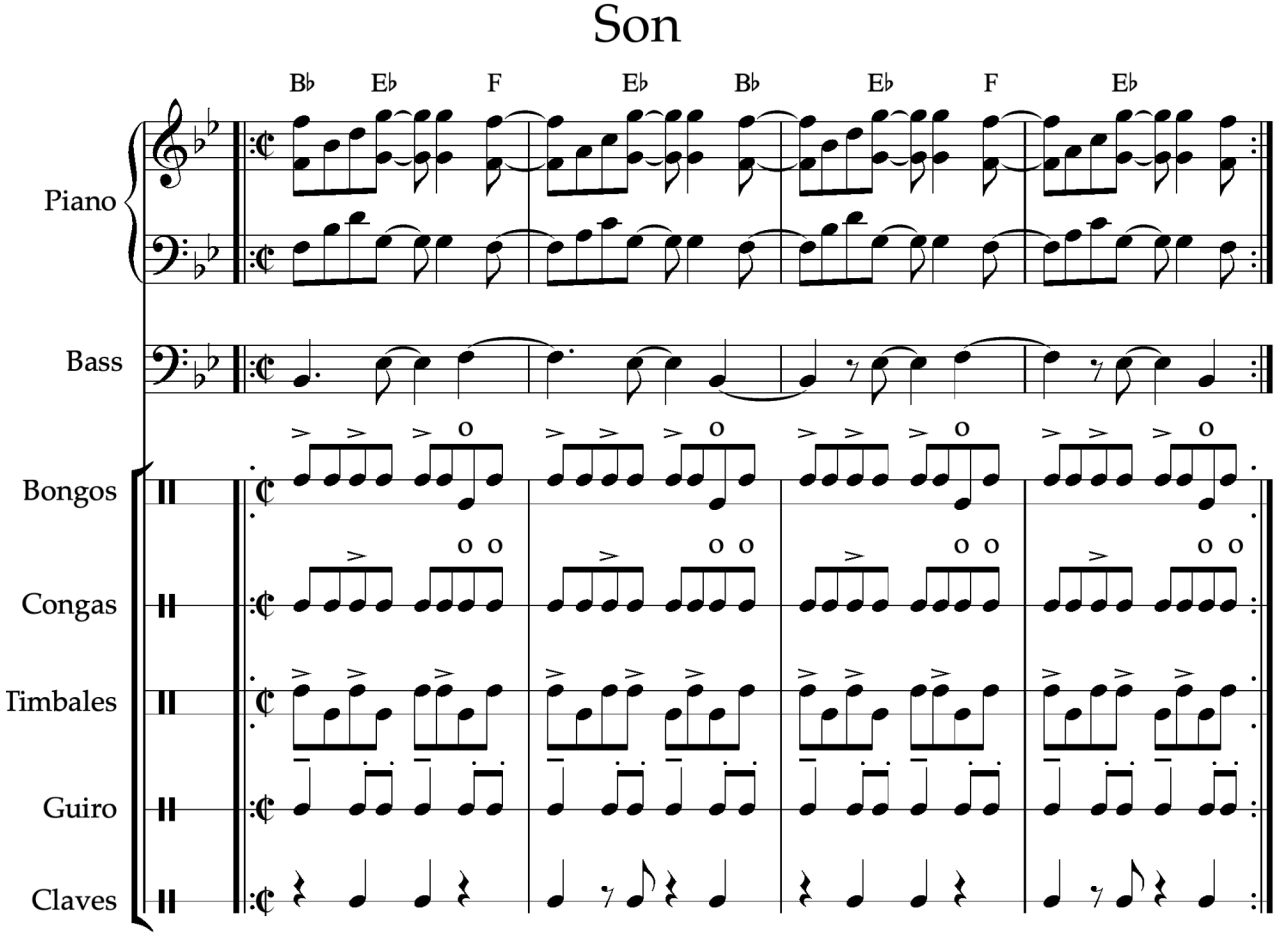

Figure 6. A basic example of son.

Danzón

Danzón is a musical style and dance that was created and played in Havana, Cuba in the late 19th century. The danzón was influenced by European music and culture, particularly the music from Spain. This music was played by *Orquestas Típicas.* These groups resembled small orchestras with various wind instruments, double bass, and violins. The percussion section consisted of classical timpani, güiro, and claves. As these Orquestas Típicas began to travel, they quickly realized that the timpani were much too big to travel with. Cuban percussionists then began to invent different versions of the timpani that were smaller and easier to carry. These new types of drums eventually evolved into the instrument that is now known as timbales.[10] Modern timbales are a pair of steel or brass drums, usually 14" and 15". They are set up with the *macho,* or smaller, drum on the right. The *hembra,* or larger drum, is on the left. The timbales, as they developed and changed, had the biggest influence on Afro-Cuban drum set players. When the drum set came to Cuba, the *timbaleros* were the first to start playing and incorporating the drum set. In the early Cuban bands that utilized the drum set, the players were adapting rhythms and patterns that were typically played on the timbales and bringing them to the drum set.[11] Here's an example of a basic danzón.

[10] Jose Luis Quintana and Chuck Silverman, *Changuito: A Master's Approach to Timbales* (London: Belmin-Wills, 1998), 16.

[11] *Leyendas De La Batería Latina.*, *YouTube* (YouTube, 2021), https://www.youtube.com/live/uZKcSv0P0go?feature=share.

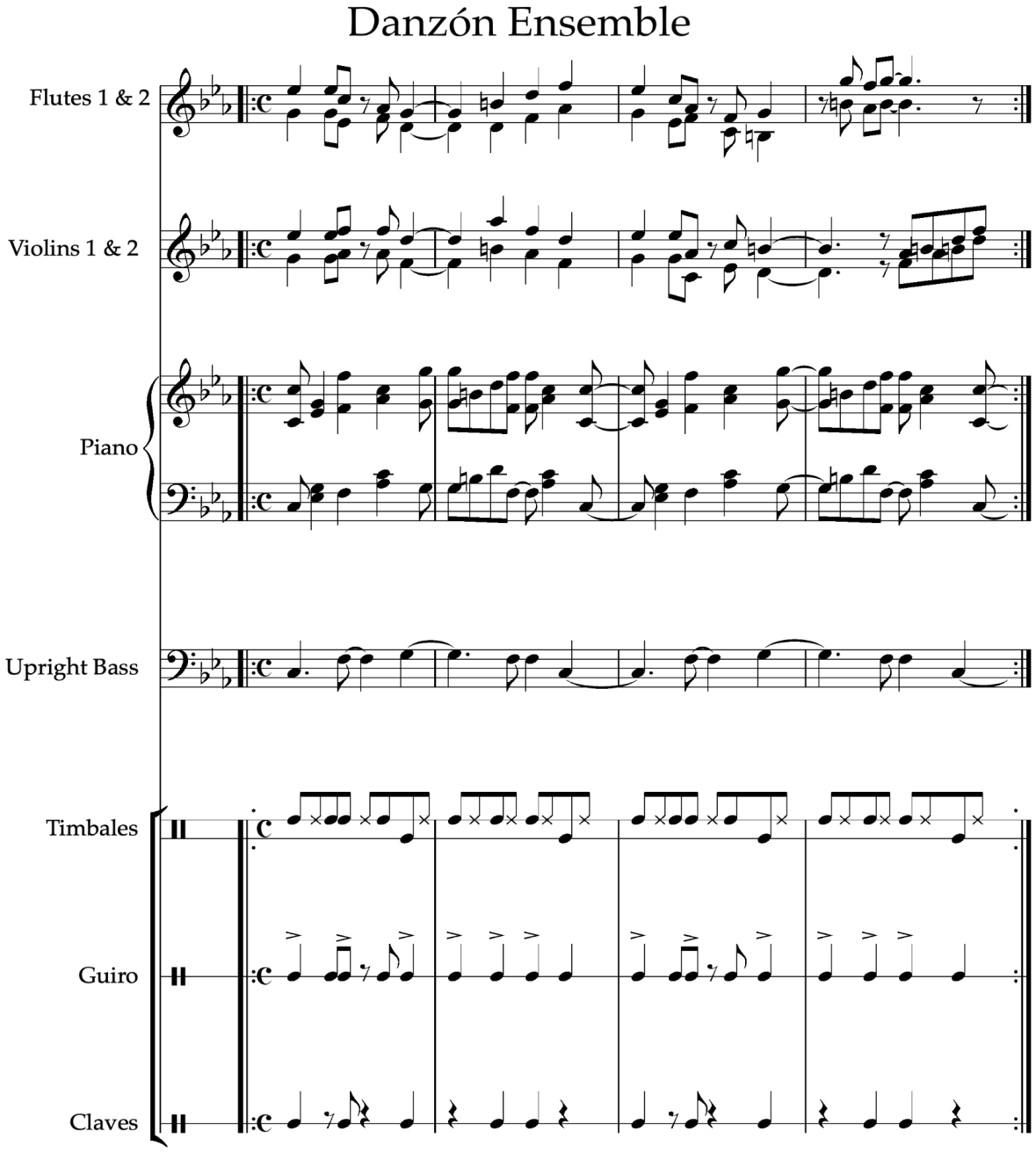

Figure 7. A basic example of danzón

Jazz in Cuba

Cuba saw the first appearance of the drum set in Cuban jazz bands in the 1920s. Cuban musicologist, saxophonist, and author of *Cubano Be Cubano Bop*, Leonardo Acosta, points out that photos of Cuban jazz bands using typical jazz instrumentation with the drum set were published as early as 1928.[12] This coincided with the increasing tourism from the United States to Cuba and the influx of American jazz bands into the country. As the American middle class grew, American-owned luxury hotels, casinos, and cabarets that catered to Americans emerged in Havana throughout the 1920s. These venues, including The Jockey Club and El Gran Casino National, hosted performances by both Cuban and American jazz bands.

During the 1920s in Cuba, Cuban jazz bands were a common sight in red-light districts, hotels, clubs, and cinemas, like their American counterparts in New Orleans. Notable Cuban jazz groups emerged during this period, such as the Cuban Jazz Band, established in Havana in 1922 by flutist and composer Jaime Prats, who is believed to have included a drum set in the ensemble. Another significant group was Moisés Simons' jazz band, whose leader was famous for composing "El Manisero (The Peanut Vendor)," which sparked the 1930s/1940s “Rhumba Craze” in the United States. Although Cuban jazz ensembles used drum sets for at least ten years before recording, American recording labels in Cuba favored Cuban-style music over jazz, recognizing an opportunity to profit from Cuban music due to the abundance of early jazz recordings in the United States. Therefore, Cuban percussion sections can be heard on the early

[12] Leonardo Acosta, *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One Hundred Years of Jazz in Cuba* (Smithsonian Books, 2003), 17.

recordings. While the drum set was used sparingly in Afro-Cuban music during this time, Cuban musicians were being influenced by the drum set and began to experiment with using the drum set in Cuban music.[13]

The popularity of American music profoundly impacted the music scene in Cuba. Ensembles in Cuba began to adapt the jazz band format to their functional and stylistic needs. In addition to playing American styles such as the Charleston and the Foxtrot, orchestras would play many “Latin” genres like the Spanish *Pasodoble,* which was very popular during this time in Cuba.[14]

One of the first orchestras to form and play in this jazz band format was the Hermanos Castro Orchestra. This group was founded by the saxophonist Manolo Castro in Havana in 1929. The orchestra's instrumentation included one trumpet, one trombone, an alto saxophone, a tenor saxophone, a violin, a piano, double bass, and drum set. The orchestra was later expanded to function more like the larger American jazz big band with the addition of three trumpets, another trombone, two alto saxophones, two tenor saxophones, and three vocalists. The orchestras during this time were very versatile, not only did they accompany singers and play big band swing, they also adapted the instrumentation to play Afro-Cuban styles.

One of the ways that these types of orchestras were able to work was to travel to the United States to perform and star in American movies. The Hermanos Castro Orchestra starred in a film titled *A Havana Cocktail*. Although this film portrays an exaggerated portrait of Cuban culture, it illustrates the influence of jazz on Cuban

[13] Mathew R Berger , “A Cultural History of the Drumset,” A Cultural History Of The Drumset, August 2, 2014, https://culturalhistoryofthedrumset.wordpress.com/.

[14] Armando Rodriguez Ruidiaz, “The Sounds of Cuban Music. Evolution of Instrumental Ensembles in Cuba,” Academia.edu, August 30, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40216723/The_sounds_of_Cuban_music_Evolution_of_instrumental_ensembles_in_Cuba, 40.

music. In the film, band leader Manolo Castro receives a request to play the W.C. Handy composition “St. Louis Blues.” The band then plays the song in the style of a Cuban son. This style that is portrayed in American film and radio became known as “Rhumba,” Which is the misspelling of the traditional Afro-Cuban style *Rumba*.[15] In an essay submitted to the Library of Congress, musicologist Dr. Carol A. Hess states,

> “...El Manisero” (The Peanut Vendor). With its catchy tune, picturesque subject matter, and fascinating percussion, “El Manisero” effectively launched the so-called rhumba craze in the United States. A popular 1930s dance loosely based on rhythms from Latin America, the rhumba enjoyed fame both in the ballroom and on the silver screen… Incidentally, an orthographical note is in order: the US music industry blithely--albeit inconsistently--added the “h” to the Spanish term, rumba, which originally denoted a music-dance ritual that offered catharsis to enslaved blacks in 19th century Cuba. In other words, it has little to do with the sophisticated nightclubs in which the rhumba was danced in the United States. In fact, “El Manisero” is not a rhumba at all but a son, a rural Afro-Cuban genre that dates from the 19th century and was played on African percussion instruments and stringed instruments of European origin.[16]

The orchestra’s percussion section in this film includes the bongo, maracas, güiro, claves, and a drum set. During this song, the drum set player plays the role of the timbale player, which was not present in this percussion section. He is heard playing the cáscara pattern on the snare drum with the *snares off*, which is traditionally played on the side or shell of the timbale.

[15] *A Havana Cocktail* (Vitaphone , 1931), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p84FgJxqkQs&ab_channel=DesmemoriadosMusicaCubana.

[16] Carol A. Hess, 2005.

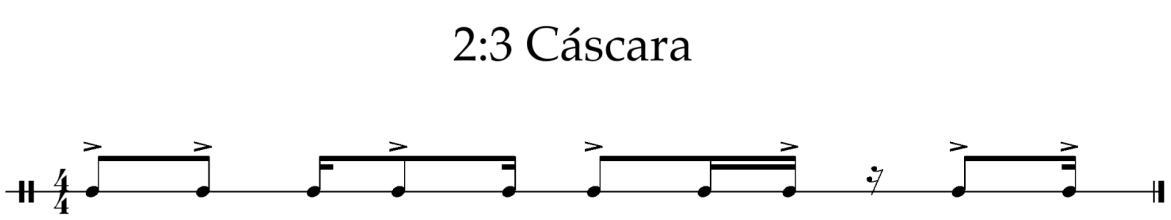

Figure 8. An example of a 2:3 cáscara pattern typically played on the shell of the timbales.

One of the biggest influences of the drum set in Afro-Cuban music was the use of cymbals. Even throughout early Afro-Cuban music in Cuba, including danzón, cymbals were not used. Throughout the film *A Havana Cocktail*, the hi-hat does not seem to be utilized, but the ride cymbal is used for “kicks” and to end songs. This is a sound that timbale and drum set players in contemporary Afro-Cuban music still use. Another rhythm that was added was playing “all four” or quarter notes on the bass drum. This is a rhythm that is also used in American swing big-band drumming that is called feathering.

The Havana Casino Orchestra, conducted by Justo Angel Aspiazú, also known by the nickname of Don Aspiazú, was one of the first groups based on the jazz band format. This band had enormous success in the United States and Europe. The Orchestra was founded in 1930. Aspiazú originally had a trumpet, guitar, piano, double bass, claves, maracas, and timbales. The orchestra was later extended to include two trumpets, three saxophones and a drum set was added to the percussion section.[17]

[17] Ruidiaz, “The Sounds of Cuban Music,” 41.

In the United States, a significant event for Cuban music occurred on April 26th, 1930, when Don Aspiazú's orchestra performed at the Palace Theater in New York. This sold-out performance marked the first time an American audience saw a rhythm section, complete with Afro-Cuban percussion instruments alongside the drum set. This group included bongo, maracas, claves, congas, and güiro. Two years later, the orchestra, which then featured singer Antonio Machín, gained further popularity with their hit song "El Manisero" and appeared in the short film *Jazz a la Cuba* produced by Paramount Studios. In the film, the entire Aspiazú orchestra performs "El Manisero," with Alvaro de la Torre credited as the drum set player. However, obtaining information about band members during this time remains difficult, with little to no mention of individual instrumentalists, even in the original recordings.

The drum set formation used in the film is similar to that of the Hermanos Castro Orchestra, consisting of a bass drum, snare drum, hi-hat, and small ride cymbal. The drum set player is more visible in this film, and the first piece played resembles the sound of a danzón. The drummer uses a typical danzón rhythm, playing on the head of the snare drum with the snares off. This rhythm is heard not only in the percussion but is also played throughout the ensemble.

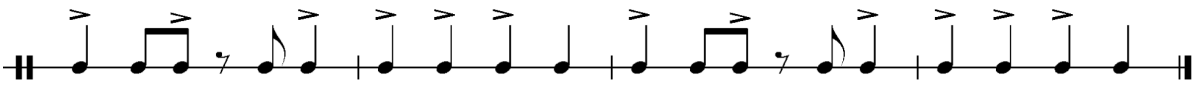

Figure 9. Basic danzón rhythm.

In the film, *Jazz a la Cuba,* the left hand of the drum set player uses a *cross-stick* technique, where the stick is held across the drum and played against the rim to produce a *rim click* sound. This is often used to imitate the sound of a clave. Also, the use of the snare drum with the snares off produces a sound that resembles the timbales. In these ways, the drum set player creates sounds and textures similar to those of timbales.

Initially, most bands using the drum set were located in and around the central city of Havana. However, the use of the drum set began to spread throughout the island, and orchestras outside of Havana began incorporating the instrument. In Santiago de Cuba, there were two prominent black-led jazz bands that used the drum set. One was led by violinist Electo "Chepín" Rosell and had started as Oriente Jazz. In 1932, with the addition of pianist Bernardo "Chovén" García, the band changed its name to Chepín-Chovén. The other group was Mariano Mercerón y sus Muchachos Pimienta.

It is important to note that these orchestras forming in Cuba (including Aspiazú's) wanted to play American jazz and Cuban music. Percussionists were eager to learn and incorporate the drum set into their music. Azpiazú's orchestra depicted in the film *Jazz a la Cuba* is an exaggerated version of Cuban culture and music, but that was only an aspect of the group's vast repertoire. In a quote from Raul Aspiazú, Don Aspiazú's son, reflects, "My father was 25 to 30 years ahead of his time. My father always liked to play American music and always had it in his mind that Cuban music would intermarry with American music, as it happened later with the mambo."[18]

[18] Leonardo Acosta, *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One Hundred Years of Jazz in Cuba* (Smithsonian Books, 2003), 96.

When these orchestras were playing in the United States, they were expected to only play “Latin” sounding music. Conversely in Cuba, they were expected to play only American music at the American-owned cabarets, casinos and hotels. This presented a problematic issue for Cuban musicians. Musicians in Cuba were interested in play many different kinds of music.

In Cuba, most percussionists, particularly timbales players, were also skilled at playing the drum set. However, during that time the Cuban government and the majority of the directors and leaders of the major orchestras did not accept the drum set as a suitable instrument to be used in Cuban music. Walfredo De Los Reyes, a renowned Cuban percussionist and drum set player, shared about his experience playing with The Orchestra Casino de la Playa in an interview with Fidel Morales. He recalled a performance where he played a traditional bolero piece using the entire drum set, only to have the director suddenly cut off the entire orchestra and ask him what he was playing. When Walfredo responded that he was playing a bolero, the director responded by saying, "the drum set does not belong in Cuban Music!"[19]

During the late 40s and 50s, larger orchestras began forming in Cuba. In Havana, they began building radio and television stations, where there was a “house” band at each radio or television station. There was a drum set player in these bands alongside the traditional Afro-Cuban percussion instruments, but the drum set was used sparingly and most often for the sections with jazz-sounding phrasing. At this time percussionists began having access to the instrument to study and experiment with. They would play rhythms traditionally played on the timbales, or if one of the more

[19] *Leyendas De La Batería Latina.*, *YouTube* (YouTube, 2021), https://www.youtube.com/live/uZKcSv0P0go?feature=share.

typical percussion instruments were missing, they would play a pattern that was typically played on one of the Afro-Cuban instruments. Additionally, the drum set player would often play maracas while sitting behind the set, or if the claves were not being played, that became something the drum set player would play in order to fill that role in the percussion section. This type of musical group was used to play many different genres of music and was formed to support different kinds of vocalists and shows. During this era, the drum set was primarily used to support the horn sections, like in a jazz big band.[20]

[20] *Leyendas De La Batería Latina.*

Afro-Cuban Jazz in New York

The origin of Afro-Cuban jazz is usually credited to Dizzy Gilespie and Chano Pozo and their songs "Manteca" and "Tin Tin Deo." This was an incredible partnership, and one that greatly effected Afro-Cuban music, however this attribution does not convey the full story of the origins of this music. A great quote by the incredible arranger and director Armando Romeu sheds more light on this topic.

> We Cuban musicians were not unaware of the technical, stylistic evolution of jazz in all its parameters, much less of Cuban music. From the very beginning, excellent jazz musicians emerged in our country, who would perform in North American jazz bands, as well as in the first Cuban ones, which started to emerge in the 20s. These bands do not play exclusively jazz but also incorporated Cuban rhythms, thus contributing to enrichment through the new acoustic, harmonic, and expressive solutions that were required.
>
> This is an example of the inter-relation between Jazz and Cuban music. But this process didn't have an instant effect; they require time to internalize the essential aspects of both genre and stimulated stylistic synthesis.[21]

In the wake of the success of "El Manisero,'" Antonio Machín, the original singer of "El Manisero," was signed to a record contract with RCA. Machín was looking for a trumpet player and turned to eighteen-year-old Mario Bauzá, giving him his first job in New York. Bauzá was a classically trained clarinetist and oboist. He convinced Machín that if he bought him a trumpet, he would be ready to play with him. Bauzá would go on to play and arrange for some of the best bands at the time, including Cab Calloway and Chick Webb.[22] At the outset of the 1940s, jazz music had attained its peak of worldwide

[21] Acosta, *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop,* 90.
[22] Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music,* 459.

popularity, as illustrated by its domination of record sales in the United States. At this point in time, jazz accounted for approximately 60 to 70 percent of the market in 1937. Jazz music had a profound impact on all the professional musicians in Cuba. Leonardo Acosta states in his book *Descarga Número Dos: El Jazz En Cuba,* "Our Musicians interpreted jazz as readily as any kind of Cuban Music, but there did not yet exist an integration of both languages."[23] That integration was precisely what Mario Bauzá set out to create.

Francisco Raúl Pérez Gutiérrez, later known as "Machito," grew up in Cuba, and became a well-known singer and Maracas player. With the help of Bauzá, Machito came to New York in 1937. Not long after his arrival in New York, the two began forming a group together. Bauzá wanted to create a Latin band with the polish, decorum, and musical excellence of Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. Bauzá's vision was to create a band of his own, focusing on incorporating Afro-Cuban elements, while maintaining the ability to accompany various singers and guest artists of the time. Machito knew the importance of incorporating authentic Afro-Cuban rhythms with jazz phrasing and harmony. Together they created Machito and his Afro-Cubans. This name was of great importance in Cuba as well as in the United States, as the name referred to the influence and inclusion of African culture in their music and musicians.

One of the many innovations of this band was the use of a traditional Afro-Cuban rhythm section. After searching for the right personnel, the percussion section consisted of José "Buyú" Mangual on bongo and Ubaldo Nieto on timbales. Maracas were played by Machito, and other percussion was sometimes played by other members of the

[23] Leonardo Acosta, *Descarga Número Dos: El Jazz En Cuba: 1950-2000* (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2002), 113.

band. This type of percussion section was modeled after a son percussion section. Another innovation by the band occurred in 1943 with the inclusion of conga player Carlos Vidal.[24] Until this point in Cuban music, the conga was reserved for rumba music and was not used in son or danzón.

In Machito's band, it was common for the timbale player to switch to a drum set for different styles, especially when playing shows with a more theatrical flair. It is very challenging to find the credits on their recordings in the 1940s, so it is difficult to confirm the exact instruments used. In a film by Columbia Pictures in 1946 titled *Thrills of Music,* Machito and his Afro-Cubans are featured playing three different songs, including one of their first hits, "Nague." [25] In this film, the members of the band are seen very clearly. There is a percussionist sitting behind a drum set that consists of a bass drum, snare drum, high tom, ride cymbal, and hi-hat cymbals. This drummer also has a cowbell mounted straight onto the bass drum, similar to how a timbale player would have a cowbell mounted. During this song, the drummer uses the drum set in a more traditional jazz way by using the bass drum and ride cymbal to "kick the band" or accent the horn rhythms. Additionally, similar to the playing discussed earlier in "El Manisero," the drummer fulfilled the role of the timbalero by playing the cáscara pattern on the side of the snare drum.

[24] John Storm Roberts, *Latin Jazz: The First Fusions, 1880s to Today* (New York, NY: Schirmer, 1999), 65-67.

[25] *Thrills of Music* (Columbia Pictures , 1946), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICDkF_uHBHM&ab_channel=Prof.JuanP.Rivera.

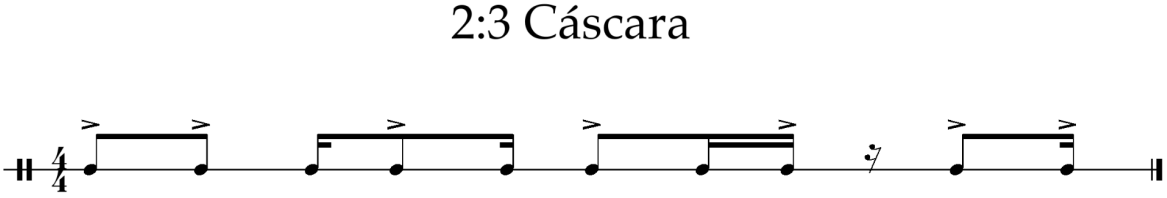

Figure 10. 2:3 cáscara pattern.

What is notably different in this recording is the use of the cowbell. During this performance of “Nague¸” the drummer plays the cowbell during the “choruses” of the song. The patterns that he plays are similar to what a *bongocero* would use. This is one of the early examples of the drum set player combining different rhythms and patterns that were traditionally played on Afro-Cuban percussion and adding them to the groove of the drum set.

Figure 11. Bongo bell pattern used in the drum set groove.

Another version of a drum set began to be used during this era. When listening to the original records of Machito, bass drum and cymbals can be heard, which is contradictory to the literature in which only timbales are credited. In a documentary titled *Machito a Latin Jazz Legacy,* there is a clip of the band playing where the

timbalero is seen very clearly. The timbalero is sitting behind what looks to be a drum set, but instead of a snare drum, he has a set of timbales in front of him. This setup consists of a bass drum, two ride cymbals, and a pair of timbales. On the timbale, there are cowbells mounted.[26] This is a precursor to a type of setup that is used in Afro-Cuban music in the 1980s and beyond.

[26] *Machito a Latin Jazz Legacy* (Icarus Films, 1984), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-spi4UqQso&t=1287s&ab_channel=ThomasLedward.

Songo

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the bands Los Van Van and Irakere created a massive shift in how the drum set was utilized in popular Cuban music. Up to this point, the drum set had yet to play a primary role in the rhythm section. Everything changed with José Luis Quintana, referred to as "Changuito," and the musical group Los Van Van, with the creation of songo. The musicologist Vincenzo Perna writes, "Songo is called the modernized son."

> In early songo, the drummer made sparse use of the cymbals except for the high hat and had its sound supplemented by two or three conga drums played by another percussionist. The rhythmic interplay between the snare tom and cowbell is reminiscent of the patterns played by palitos in the rumba and of the cáscara pattern derived from the rumba and often played by the timbales in Cuban dance music.[27]

José Luis Quintana, "Changuito," is widely recognized as a pioneer, particularly for his innovative contributions to developing songo percussion and drum set rhythms. It is important to note that not only was Changuito an amazing and innovative drum set player, but he is internationally known for his *tumbadora* (conga) playing as well. This is an essential aspect of the rich tradition of percussionists in Cuba. Growing up as a percussionist in Cuba, one must be well-versed in all the percussion instruments. Changuito, from a young age, was known for his tumbadora playing. In an interview with Giovanni Hidalgo from an instructional video titled, *Evolution of the Tumbadoras,* he describes carrying on the tradition of being a *tumbador* (conga player) from his father.

[27] Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis*, 37.

His father, Pedro Luis Quintana, and his uncle, Roberto Quintana were both great tumbadora players and percussionists in their own right. At the age of six, Changuito began playing in a local group in his hometown of Casablanca. By the age of eight, he was playing professionally at the Tropicana. Changuito would go on to develop his style of playing, including the “Mano Secreta,” which is a technique that is now part of the lexicon of any aspiring conga player.[28]

In the educational video, *La Historia del Songo*, Changuito details his experience joining the renowned musical group Los Van Van shortly after its formation. Changuito states that having the drum set in the band was a complete experiment. The band's bassist and founder, Juan Formell, decided to experiment with having the drum set be an important part of the band. During the documentary, he divides the songo style into what he calls *movimientos* or movements. In Changuito’s first movimiento, he discusses how the pattern was based on a groove by the first drummer of Los Van Van, Blas Egües.[29]

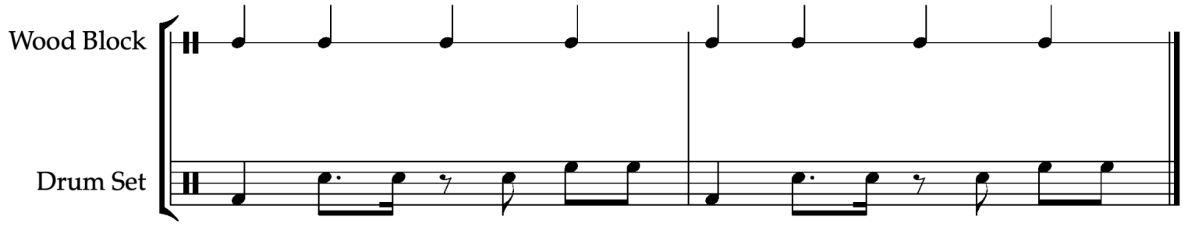

Figure 12. Movimiento 1.

[28] *Evolution of the Tumbadoras*, *YouTube* (DCI, 2015), https://youtu.be/kVM7nv4AtLA.
[29] *La Historia Del Songo* , *YouTube* (DCI, 2013), https://youtu.be/e0BMLzFDnF8.

Figure 12 is an example of the use of rhythms that are influenced by traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms. This figure shows the beginning of innovation in Afro-Cuban drum set playing. Prior to this time in history, the drum set was adapted to play a role that was needed that was previously played by another percussion instrument.

As discussed earlier, the Clave rhythm is an essential aspect of Cuban music. In the documentary, Changuito states that very commonly in the United States, percussionists will play rhythms over a son clave.

2:3 Son Clave

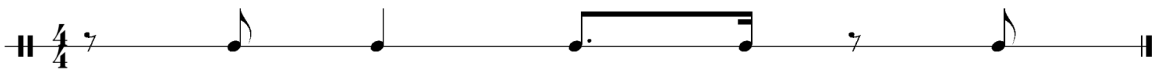

Figure 13. 2:3 son clave.

While in Cuba, it is common to play the grooves and rhythms within the context of a rumba clave.

2:3 Rumba Clave

Figure 13.1. 2:3 rumba clave

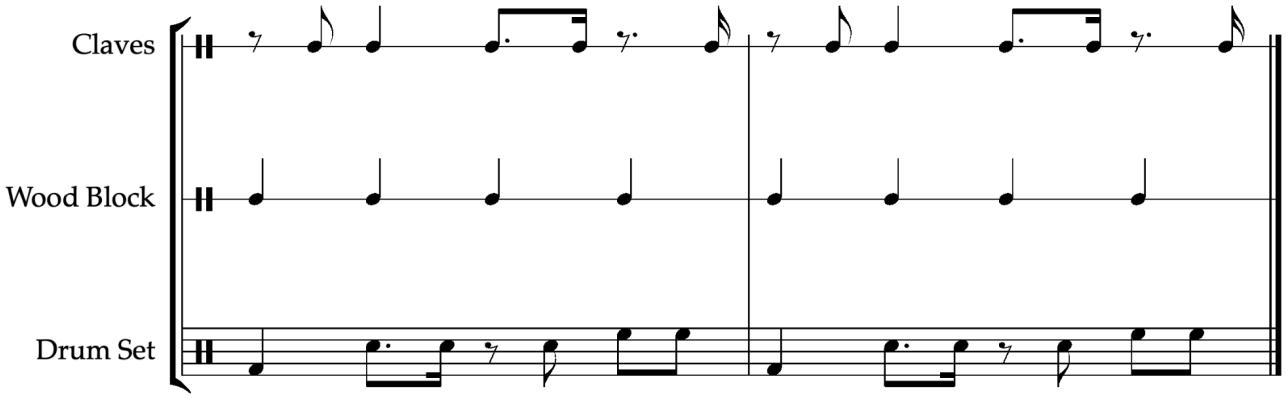

Figure 14. Displays the previous movimiento with the rumba clave pattern shown.

In Changuito’s second movimiento, he describes taking Blas Egües's pattern and expanding on the idea, by adding his own flavor to the groove. Here is the movimiento with the clave written as well.

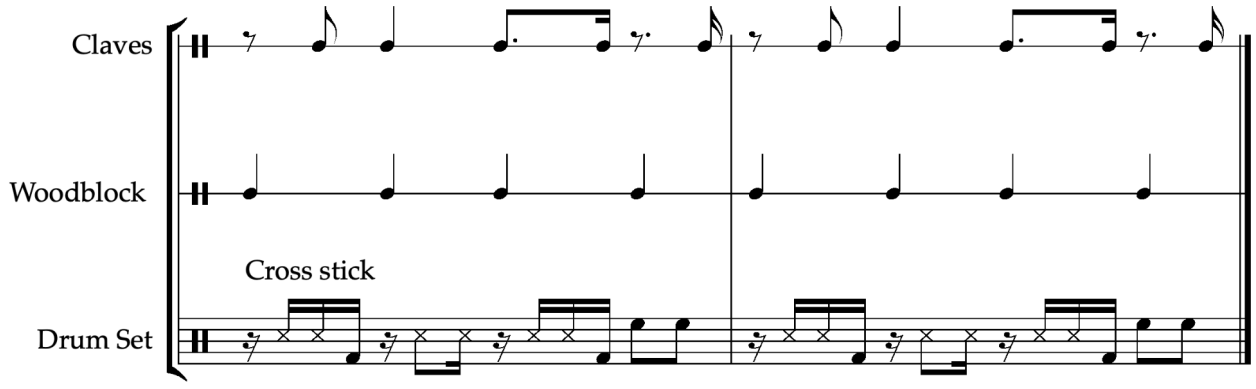

Figure 15. Movimiento 2.

American rhythm and blues (R&B) drum set performance practices notably influenced Changuito's rhythmic creations. He cites the two bands Blood, Sweat & Tears and Chicago as sources of inspiration for his utilization of the hi-hat, snare, and bass drum. This can be seen as a point of convergence between American popular music and Cuban dance music from the 1970s; a trend that continues to this day.[30]

In Changuito's third movement, he displays the use of a backbeat within this songo variation. Figure 16 illustrates the movement with the clave written.

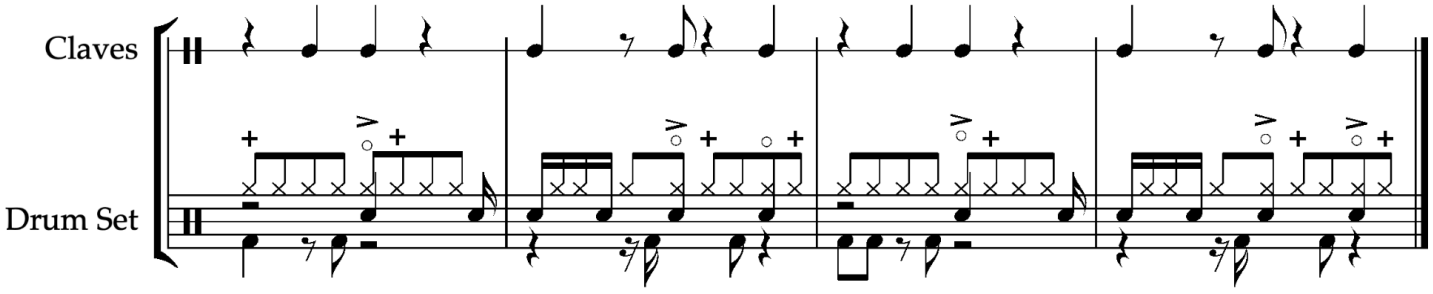

Figure 16. Movimiento 3

Changuito goes on to describe a movimiento he calls the primordial pattern. In this pattern or groove, we hear the combination of many different elements of Afro-Cuban percussion. He describes this pattern as containing the *sabor* (flavor) of traditional Afro-Cuban music. The groove achieves a unique and dynamic sound by blending songo and rumba styles while adhering to the Afro-Cuban percussion tradition of improvisational freedom. This groove is played with the addition of a mounted cowbell similar to what was used in Machito's band. The rhythm played on the cowbell is one that would be traditionally played by the bongocero.

[30] *La Historia Del Songo*

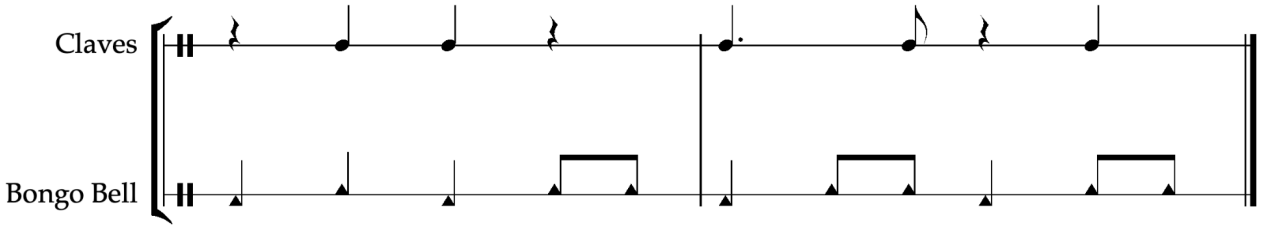

Figure 17. Bongo bell pattern.

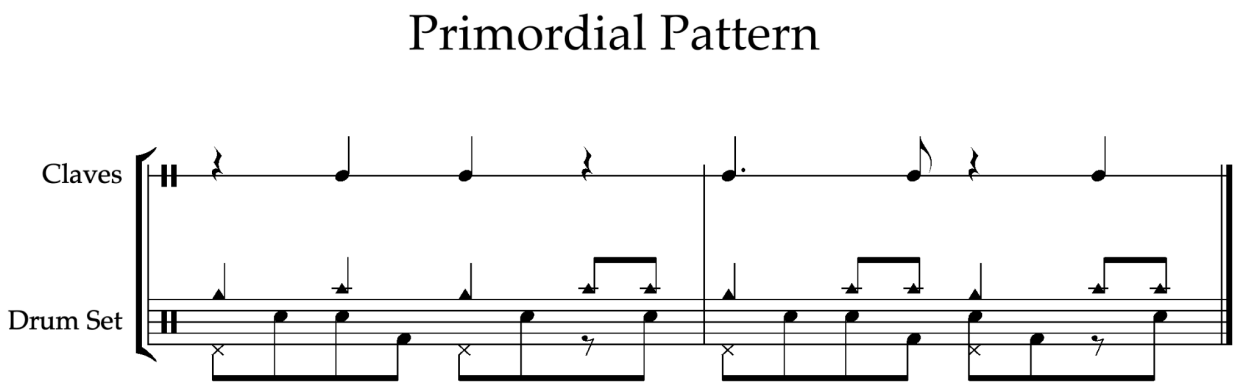

Figure 18. Primordial Pattern

As in all of Afro-Cuban percussion, there is a lot of improvisation. This is an essential element of all Afro-Cuban music, and playing the drum set is no exception. While he is playing, the anchor of the groove is felt in the cowbell, but the rest of the groove is constantly changing and being improvised. This is the real beginning of contemporary Afro-Cuban drum set playing.

Another innovation by Changuito that is important to note is the combination of the drum set and timbales. During the 1980s, Changuito began using a new instrument setup. Instead of playing the drum set, he began playing the timbales standing up with

the addition of some drums from the drum set. He added the bass drum and a floor tom to the right side of the timbales, as well as a ride cymbal. This setup is used all over the world in popular salsa bands to this day.

Los Van Van embraced the integration of electrified instruments into their music, including the violin, electric bass and guitar, keyboard, and drum set. Their early success can be attributed mainly to their position as innovators, as they introduced Western rock and pop elements into traditional Cuban dance music. This is evident in their vocal harmonies, reminiscent of soul music from the United States and the Beatles.[31]

Dafnis Prieto, writes in his book, *A World of Rhythmic Possibilities*,

> Much can be said about this extraordinary band and the characteristics of its style - from their musical legacy to the socio-cultural repercussions their music had on the island of Cuba throughout the years. Los Van Van is not only an extraordinary band but also a cultural phenomenon. Their songs are often inspired by people's everyday lives and experiences, and have become so widely known that they service anthems for the entire Cuban population. Songs like "La Sandunguera" and "El Buey Cansao," among many others have gained a mythic status connecting directly to their followers.[32]

[31] Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis* 36.

[32] Dafnis Prieto, *A World of Rhythmic Possibilities: Drumming Lessons and Reflections on Rhythms* (New York: Dafnison Music, 2016), 88.

OCMM and Irakere

In 1967, in an effort to connect with the youth of the country, the government of Cuba and the National Council for Culture formed the Orquesta Cubana de Música Moderna (OCMM). The OCMM was essentially a big band with some of the best jazz musicians at the time, including Arturo Sandoval on trumpet, Paquito D'rivera on saxophone, Jesus "Chucho" Valdez on piano, percussionists Oscar Valdés Jr, Roberto García, Oscar Valdés Campos, and drum set players Guillermo Barreto and Enrique Plá.

The band was formed to play music that was popular in the United States, but was presented in a "Cuban" way by Cuban musicians. They played a varied repertoire consisting of standard and third-stream jazz, jazz-rock, popular music, and film soundtracks. The OCMM played a crucial role in the history of modern Cuban music.[33] It allowed the musicians time to create new styles as well as experiment with fusing rumba and son with popular music. This was one of the first popular Cuban bands to have a drum set integral to the percussion section. Not only did they have a drum set, but they had two drum set players that played at the same time. This allowed Guillermo Barreto and Enrique Plá to work with and learn from each other. Combined with the percussion section, they were able to innovate different ways to fuse different grooves and styles together. The OCMM also acted as an incubator of talents who were to become part of one of the most important Afro-Cuban bands. In 1973 the Orquesta's

[33] Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis*, 38-39.

pianist “Chucho” Valdez, along with some of the band's youngest members, including drummer Enrique Plá, formed a new group called Irakere.

Irakere developed a danceable fusion of styles, from jazz, rock, Afro-Cuban popular music, and folkloric influences. Irakere was one of the first bands to incorporate elements of the African tradition of rumba and santeria. Along with using a drum set, they adopted traditional rumba instruments such as the *batá* drums, *chekeré,* and the *agogó* bell into a modern language based on a fusion of jazz and Cuban popular music with influences from funk and rock.[34]

Enrique Plá played an American-style drum set with additions of mounted cowbells on the hi-hat and a mounted “jam block” that was used to sound like a clave. On the Irakere song “Que se sepa, Yo Soy de la Habana,” Plá plays a pattern that is used throughout Afro-Cuban drum set playing to this day. The cáscara pattern is traditionally played on the shell of the timbale, on the cymbal, and by adding an accent on what is called the bomba note with the bass drum. In the other hand, he is playing the 3:2 rumba clave pattern on the jam block. By doing this, he is covering the roles of two percussionists in his two hands.

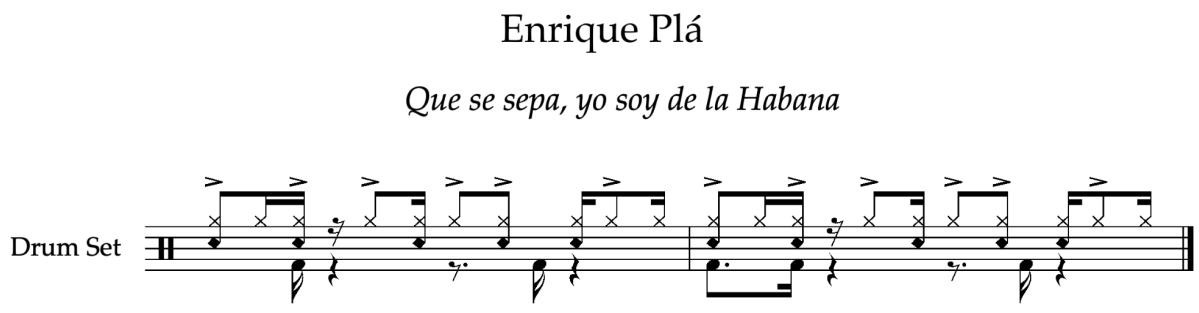

Figure 19. Enrique Plá transcription.

[34] Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis* 40.

Contemporary Afro-Cuban Drum Set

Following the innovations of Changuito, Los Van Van, and Irakere, the next generation of Afro-Cuban drummers continued to expand upon what came before them. These drummers include Ignacio Berroa, Horacio “El Negro” Hernández, Jimmy Branly, Samuel Formell, and Dafnis Prieto, to name a few. These drummers have taken the traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms that were initially played on several different percussion instruments and adapted them to be played by one person on the drum set. Many times in contemporary Afro-Cuban groups, as well as Afro-Cuban jazz groups, there is only one percussionist, the drum set player. In this situation, there is a lot of freedom but also difficult choices to be made in order to play what the music needs while also playing your own style. For example, if you are playing a song in the style of a Cuban son, a drummer might choose to put the clave a rhythm or the cáscara pattern somewhere in the groove. In order to incorporate the different layers of rhythms into a groove, some drummers began to use pedals that were attached to different percussion instruments, such as a jam block or a cowbell.

Dafnis Prieto is a great example of what it means to play contemporary Afro-Cuban drum set. Prieto comes from the tradition of this music, but has also been at the forefront of innovation of the music and drum set playing. Dafnis is able to incorporate many of the important rhythms into this playing, like the clave or cáscara, without being restricted by them.

Conclusion

The culmination of this master's thesis unveils the intricate and gradual evolution of the drum set's inclusion into Afro-Cuban music. The incorporation of the drum set entailed experimentation and ingenuity. The drum set first arrived on the island in the early 20th century through jazz from the United States. The drum set was utilized in the shows and big bands in Cuba. It did not become a vital part of the rhythm section until the 1960s and 70s. During the 1970s, Changuito's innovative approach of including other styles into the grooves and patterns of the drum set sparked a revolution. This was during a time where Cuban musicians were actively seeking to create and develop their own national styles of music to share with the world. Through cultural exchange and musical fusion, the drum set has emerged as a pivotal component of various Afro-Cuban rhythm sections. Its versatility and ability to accommodate diverse musical contexts have rendered it a highly sought-after instrument in contemporary Afro-Cuban ensembles.

While conducting research for this study, some limitations and challenges were presented. It is arduous to find concrete information from early Cuban history. The majority of the information written by Cuban musicologists and scholars are still stored on the island in libraries and homes, inaccessible to the rest of the world. To fully comprehend the depth of the historical and cultural connections, traveling to Cuba and gaining access to this information would be necessary. Additionally, this study only focuses on four key styles of Afro-Cuban music: rumba, danzón, son, and Afro-Cuban

jazz. It would require a lifetime of study to fully grasp the myriad of styles of Afro-Cuban music.

Future research could expound upon the role of the drum set in other genres of music in the Afro-Cuban Idiom, such as timba, latin rock, Cuban pop, and Cuban rap. Thus, this thesis offers a glimpse into the rich and vibrant history of Afro-Cuban music and the drum set's pivotal role in its evolution.

Glossary

Bongó - Small pair of high-pitched hand drums typically positioned between the legs and performed in a seated position by one performer; drums are tuned to two separate pitches and are often played during verses of Cuban dance music songs.

Bongocero - A bongó player.

Campana de bongó - The bongó bell, a large hand-held cowbell performed by the bongó player during call and response choruses in Cuban popular music.

Caña brava - Wild cane, name for a piece of bamboo used as an instrument within early songo drum set rhythms of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Cáscara - A rhythm performed on the drum shell of the timbales and often associated with many forms of Cuban dance music, often utilized during verses of popular songs.

Claves - A set of two thick wooden sticks producing a high-pitched sound. An organizing rhythmic principle within Cuban dance music. Clave is known to be organized in two directions known as 3:2 clave and 2:3 clave, and have slight variations in rhythm (see rumba clave and son clave).

Congas - Barrel-shaped hand drums typically performed in a seated position by one performer or mounted for performance in a standing position. Typically played in sets of two drums by performers within Cuban dance music.

Conguero - A conga player.

Doble campana - Double bell, or the practice of performing two separate cowbell patterns by one performer. Typically combines the function of the bongó bell and mambo bell. This pattern was created by Changuito.

Güiro - Elongated gourd or gourd-shaped plastic instrument with a grooved surface on one side, performed by scraping a stick along the grooves.

Güirero - A güiro player.

Jam block - A plastic percussion instrument manufactured by the company Latin Percussion. Often mountable and imitating the sound of a woodblock or claves.

Movimiento - Movement - a term within the songo style associated with composed percussion section rhythms that were created by percussionist José Luis Quintana.

Orquesta Cubana de Música Moderna - Cuban Orchestra of Modern Music or OCMM. An ensemble from the 1960s that was comprised of several members of the band Irakere.

Rumba clave - A rhythm and organizing rhythmic concept associated with the rumba genre but is also associated with many other forms of Cuban dance music. The rhythm is known to be organized in two directions, known as 3:2 clave and 2:3 clave.

Son clave - A rhythm and organizing rhythmic concept associated with the son genre but is also associated with many other forms of Cuban dance music. The rhythm is can be organized in two directions, known as 3:2 clave and 2:3 clave.

Songo - A genre of dance music formed in the late 1960s in Cuba and performed by ensembles consisting of, but not limited to, strings, flute, brass and wind players, vocalists, electric keyboards, electric bass, Afro-Cuban percussion and drum set. Made popular by Los Van Van and others.

Timba - A genre of dance music formed in the late 1980s in Cuba and performed by ensembles consisting of, but not limited to, brass or wind players, vocalists, piano,

electric keyboard, electric bass, Afro-Cuban and drum set. Made popular by NG La Banda and others.

Timbales - Pair of drums associated with Cuban dance music and other pan-Latin music genres. Played on both the drumhead and drum shell with sticks by one performer in a standing position and can be seen with mounted cowbells or other mounted percussion instruments, considered a common incorporation into the contemporary drum set in the timba genre.

Timbalero - A timbale player.

Tumbadora - Conga drum.

Tumbador - Conga player.

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