A Conversation in Rhythm

A History of Afro-Cuban Rhythms

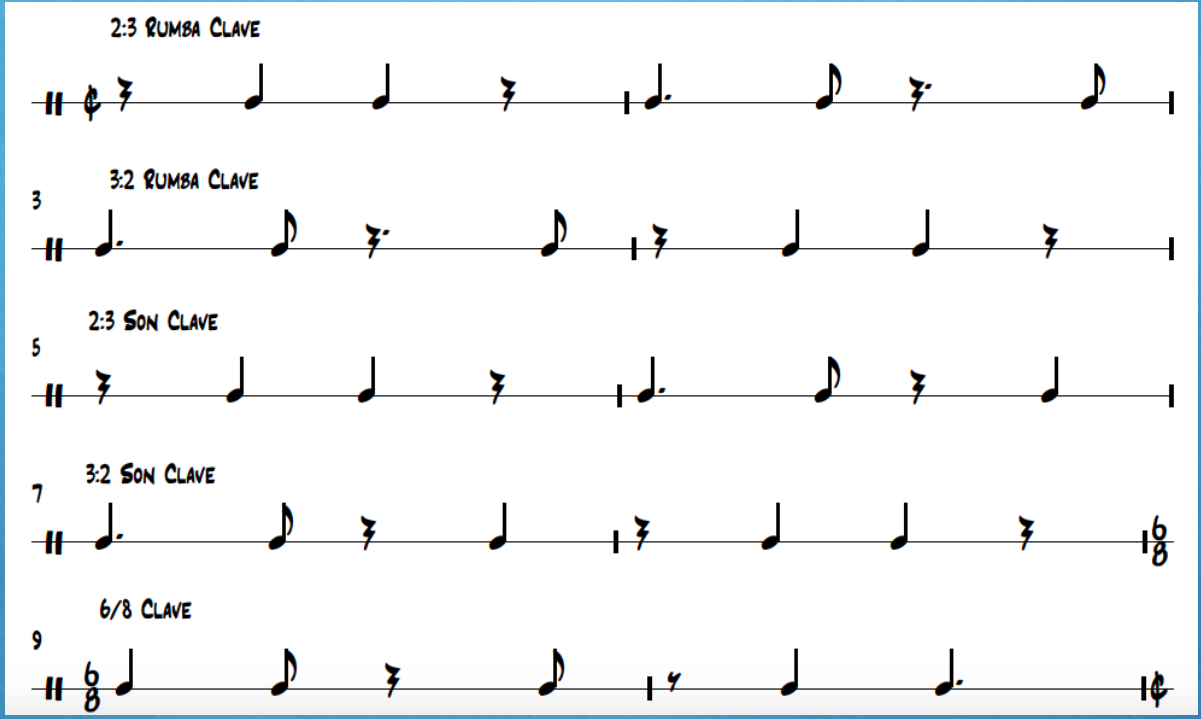
What are we going to be looking at?

- Learning about the history of Afro-Cuban music.
- Understanding how the clave works.
- Breaking down bell patterns of specific styles.
- Looking how the instruments interlock with one another.

Afro-Cuban Percussion Instruments

The Clave

- The clave is the most important element in Cuban music.
- The literal translation is ‘the key’.
- They were originally shipping pegs sailors would hit together.
- They are the basis of all Cuban styles and are the rhythmic glue that ties everything together.



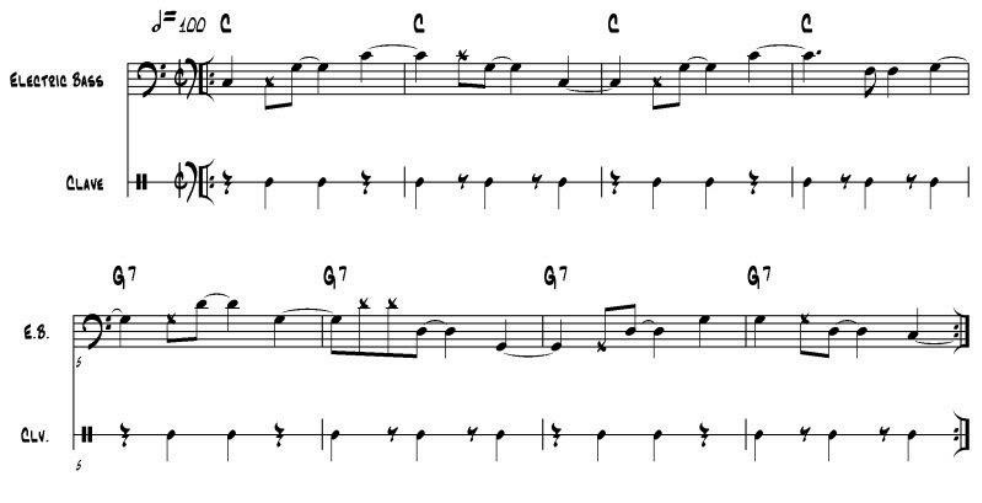
Afro-Cuban Styles and their Clave

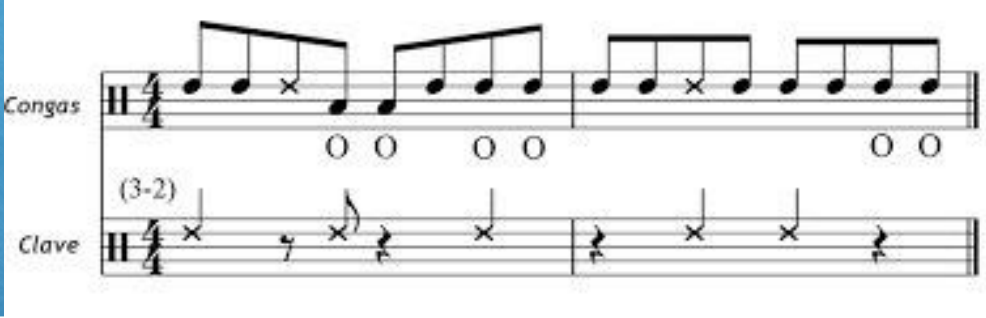
- Son: Son
- Son Montuno: Son
- Mambo: Son
- Cha-Cha-Chá: Son
- Rumba: Rumba
- Mozambique: Rumba
- Songo: Rumba
- Bembe (6-8 Afro-Cuban): Rumba

Features of Afro-Cuban Music

- This music along with other styles from countries such as Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic is referred to as Salsa (Sauce).
- Son Montuno was termed Salsa in 1960's New York. Traditional Son and rumba style were popular in America in the 40's and 50's as Cuban migrants had come to the country to work in construction in the 20's and 30's, mainly in New York and New Jersey as well as in Florida in the south.

Within Afro-Cuban music we play the Tumbao. This is a syncopated figure played on the bass and ‘comped’ on the congas and percussion.

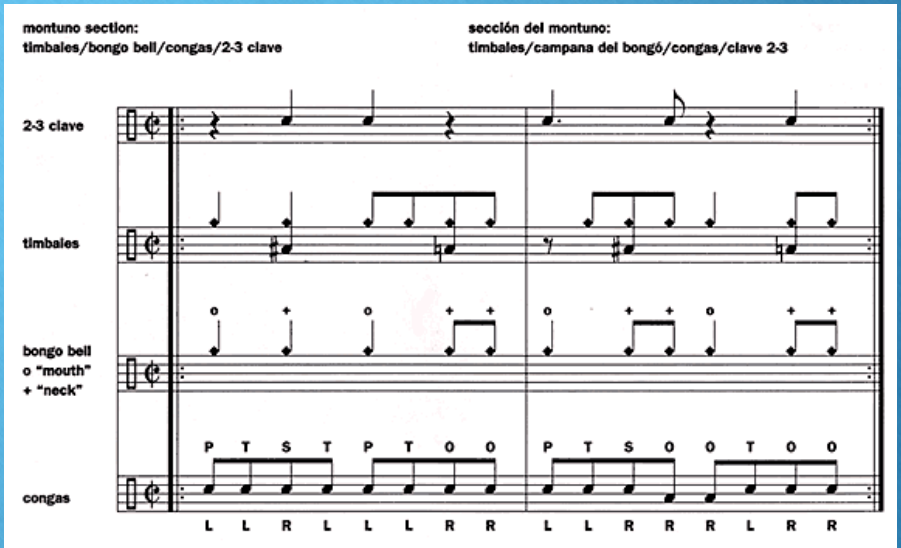




Remember:
The kick of the clave adds the important syncopation the music needs.

Traditional Styles: Son

- Son was the first main modern Afro-Cuban style.
- It evolved in the late 19th century in the Eastern Oriente region of Cuba.
- It is stylized by bass, tumbao, clave and montuno piano.

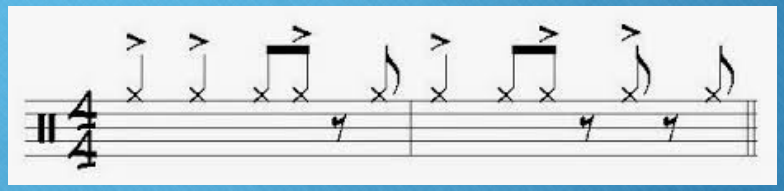


Son Clave

Son Montuno

- This is a variation of Son.
- This developed in the 30's and 40's and it a pre-cursor to many modern popular styles.
- The cascara (shell) pattern is the driving rhythm behind this style.
- It was popularized by trés (3 string guitar) player and band leader Arsenio Rodriguez.

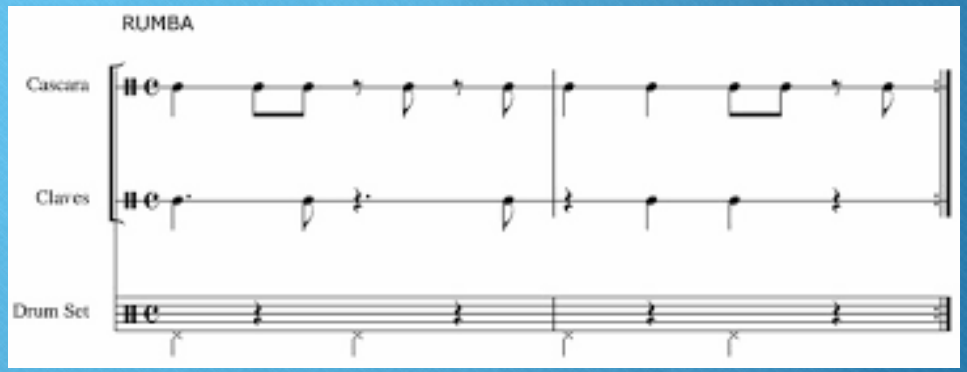
montuno is also used for a piano guajeo, the ostinato figure accompanying the montuno section, when it describes a repeated syncopated piano vamp, often with chromatic root movement.



Son Clave

Rumba

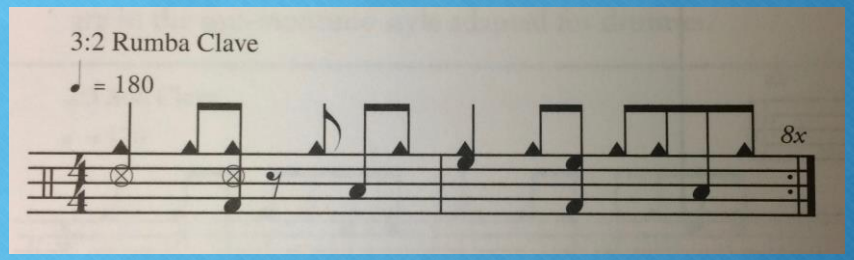
- This is a classic style that influenced modern salsa.
- Rumba is an umbrella term that consists of other styles such as yambú, guagancó and columbia.
- The rumba clave is more syncopated than the son.
- It started in the late 19th century and was used by Americans by 1920.



Rumba Clave

Guaguancó

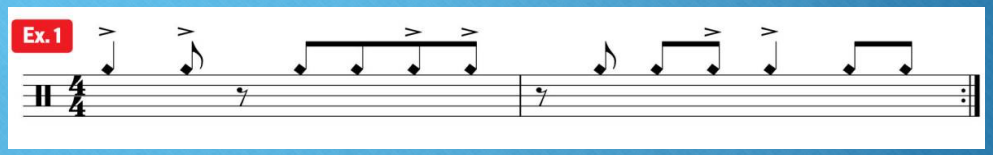
- This is a traditionally rumba style played on 3 congas.
- The main feature is the conga melody in the 2nd half of the clave measure



Rumba Clave

Popular Styles of the 40's and 50's: Mambo

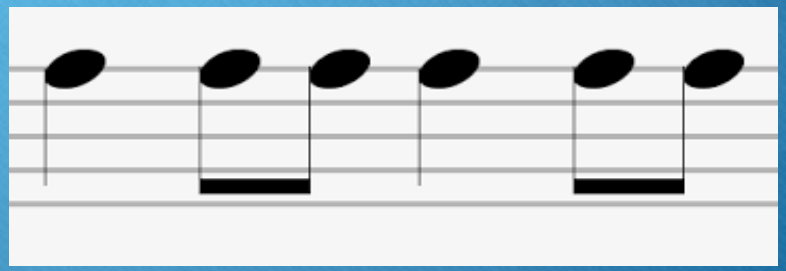
- Mambo started in the late 40's and was popular throughout the 50's.
- Mambo is also a term for an instrumental 'shout' section, where the brass play energetic figures.
- Timbalero and band leader Tito Puente was nicknamed 'The Mambo King' for popularising the style.



Son Clave

Cha-Cha-Chá

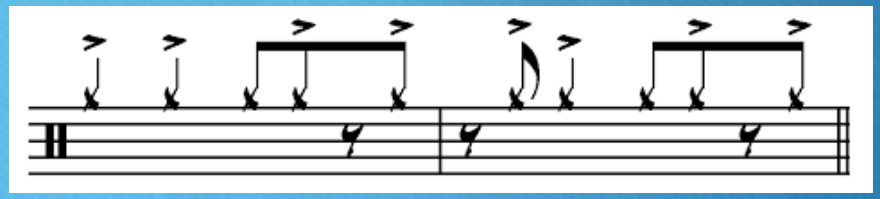
- A dance style played between 90-120 bpm.
- It was created in the early 50's.
- Played by charanga bands it is less syncopated Son, due to its elegant and reserved ambience.
- The timbalero plays the cha-cha bell which is smaller and higher pitched than the mambo bell.
- The most famous example is 'Oye Como Va', written by Tito Puente but made famous by Santana.
- The timbale roll you hear at the start is called the abancio (fan) as it sounds like a fan opening. The timbales lead the band into new sections.



Son Clave

Popular Styles from the 50's and 60's: Mozambique

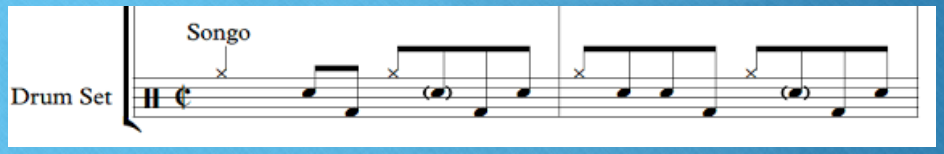
- This style was attributed to timbalero Manny Oquendo in New York in the late 50's and early 60's.
- Many drummers have applied this rhythm to the kit, most notably the great Steve Gadd on Paul Simon's song 'Late In The Evening' from the album 'One-Trick Pony'.



Rumba Clave

Songo

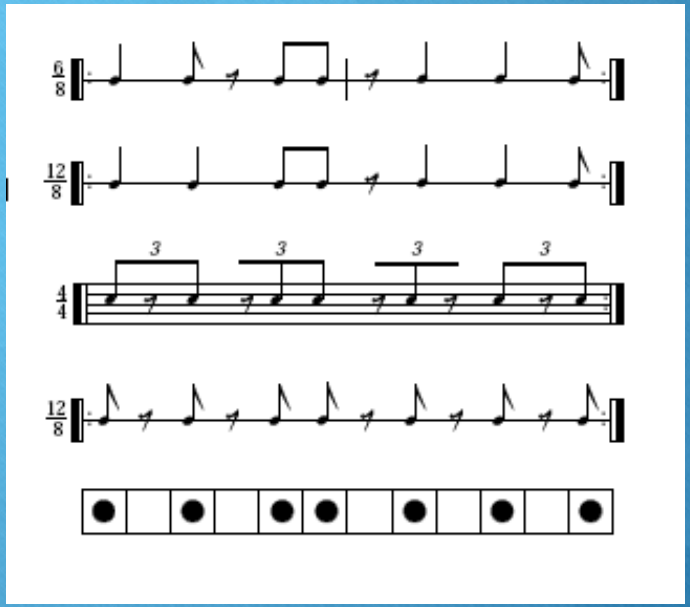
- This style was inspired by bassist Juan Formell.
- Formell is the leader and founder of the group Los Van Van.
- Notable player in the band is percussionist Changuito.
- This style is more modern, encompassing elements of funk, Son and contemporary rhythms.
- This style has a strong crotchet plus on the cowbell.



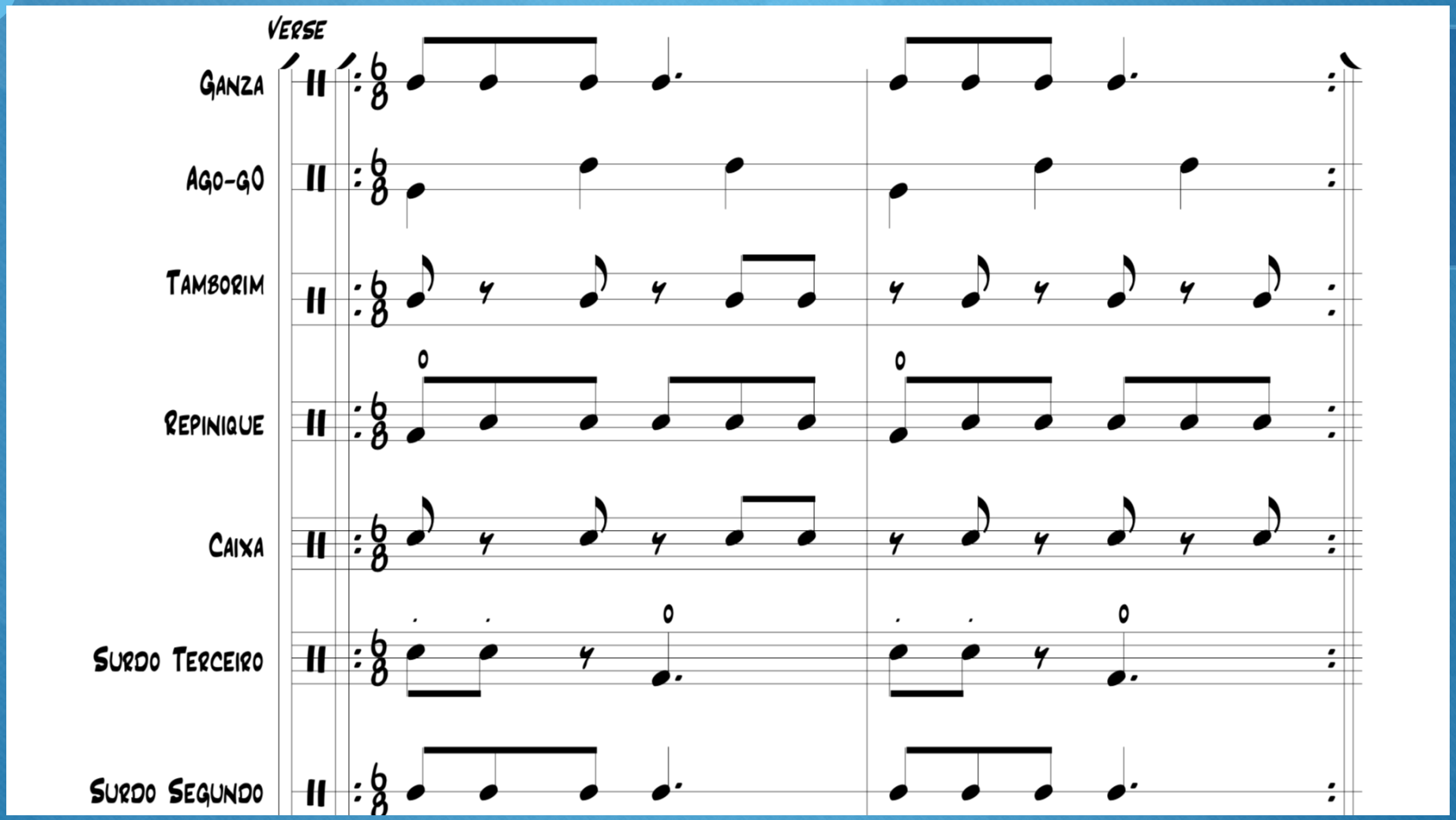
Rumba Clave

Bembe (6-8 Afro-Cuban)

- Bembe is a style that originated from religious gatherings in West Africa.
- The term Bembe refers to 3 drums made of hollowed pal tree logs.
- It is the style often considered as the basis of the evolution of Afro-Cuban styles.



Rumba Clave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