Latin Music for Fanfare and Concert Band

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Abstract

The recent popularity of Latin and salsa music has yielded many compositions and arrangements for fanfare and concert band in that style. This document presents essential guidelines for playing Latin music (Cuban or Puerto Rican style) for band.

1 Introduction

Latin music, also known as *Salsa, Cuban, Afro-Cuban* or *Latin Jazz* music, enjoys a strong revival. The term covers a wide range of musical styles and requires a great deal of knowledge, skills and experience in order to perform it in a more or less authentic way.

Latin music also has lead to a set of more or less standardised instrumental groups, such as the *charanga, conjunto, sexteto* and *típica*, focusing on either percussion, string or brass instruments. Obviously, the *percussion group* is the core section in Latin music, creating the sometimes very intricate rhythmic base for the singers and other instrumentalists.

The upsurge in Latin music has its offspring in the repertoire for *fanfare* and *concert band*. This document will discuss fundamentals and essential aspects that the band conductor and members should notice and respect, when preparing to perform Latin compositions and arrangements in concert. The references at the end of this paper deal more extensively with this subject, see e.g. [3, 5].

2 The percussion section in the band

The standard *size* of the percussion section in the fanfare or concert band is two players (excluding the tympani and mallet player). This probably will not suffice to create a genuine Latin groove. Listening to Latin music recordings one can frequently identify a percussion section of *four players* on e.g., *claves*, *cowbell* and *timbales*, *congas* or *bongos* and *guiro* or *maracas*. Therefore, a sufficient number of players in the band should be assigned to the percussion section for this style of music.

Another aspect is the importance of the percussion section in Latin band music. It is essential to have the rhythm section, e.g., the bass, drums and percussion (and the guitar and keyboard player, when available) lay down the right *groove*, starting with the percussion. The final Latin groove is the addition of a number of *polyrhythmic* contributions; each player has its independent rhythmic pattern. All the independent patterns should be carefully *synchronised*, and should respect the appropriate *accents*. During rehearsals the percussion section should *not* be considered the icing on the cake and be requested to join the full orchestra after the other instrumental parts have been prepared and monitored. On the contrary, rehearsing wind and brass parts should start *after* the Latin percussion section is capable of achieving a stable, stimuLating and challenging Latin groove.

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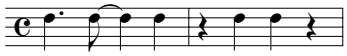
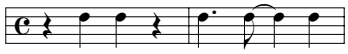
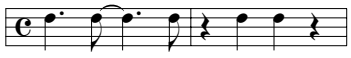
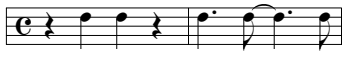
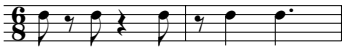
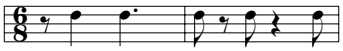
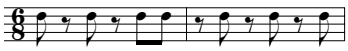
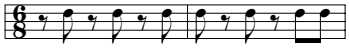
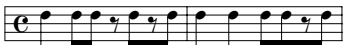
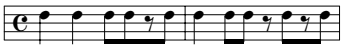
3 The clave pattern

The basis of most Latin music styles is the *clave pattern*; in the band this is played by a member of the percussion section, using the *claves*. The clave pattern will be audible as a clear, high-pitch sound, not unlike the click-track sounds in film music recording studios. As an alternative the clave pattern is assigned to the band drummer, using *rim-clicks* on the*snare drum*.

The clave pattern is a repeated two-measure rhythmic pattern, consisting of one syncopated measure with *three beats*, called the *tresillo*, followed by a measure containing *two beats*. This is designated as the *3-2 clave* or the basic *son clave* and is shown in as the first entry in Table 1. The notation using (dotted) quarter notes is for convenient reading only; the sound of the claves will be staccato anyway.

Table 1: Latin percussion rhythms

Pattern name	**Forward direction** 3-2 clave	**Reverse direction** 2-3 clave
Son clave		
Rumba clave		
6/8 clave		
6/8 clave (var)		
Cascara		

When playing the clave there two things to remember:

1. The clave pattern may be played in *reversed* order, i.e., the two-beat measure precedes the three-beat measure; this is designated as *2-3 clave* and shown in the last column in Table 1. Interviews with many renowned Latin musicians stress the importance of respecting the appropriate order of the clave. Each player should adapt his individual pattern to the direction of the clave, and closely monitor changes in this order during a piece. Therefore, some composers and arrangers prevent confusion for conductor and musicians by putting the appropriate label in the score (above the staff, as redundant information).

2. There are variations on the basic *son clave*, depending on the style and meter of the music; the basic distinction is between the clave in even (such as 4/4 or 2/2) and odd meters (such as 6/8). A number of these are shown in the table.

4 The cascara pattern

The *cascara pattern*, also known as *palito*, is usually played by the *timbalero* on either the sides of the *timbales* (the cylindrical shells) or on the *cowbell* (or a set of bells). This, like the clave, results in a clear and fairly high-pitched series of short duration attacks.

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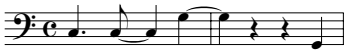
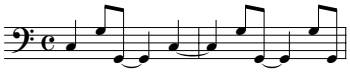
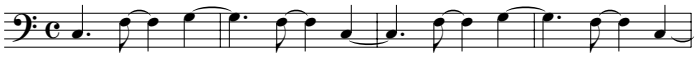
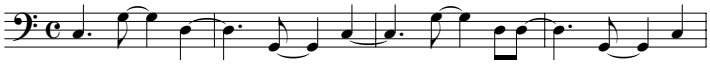
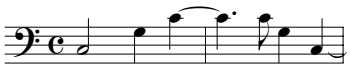
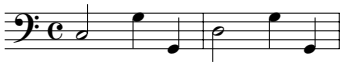
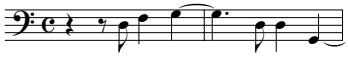
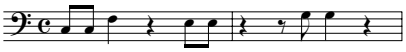
The forward and reversed cascara pattern are shown on the last line in Table 1. Note the synchronisation of the syncopated beat between cascara and the three-beat measure of the clave.

5 The bass tumbao pattern

Table 2: Latin bass patterns

Pattern name	Basic rhythmic cell (involving frequent repeats)
Tumbao (3-2 clave)	
Tumbao (variation)	
Son tumbao	
Continuous anticipation	
Mambo (no syncopation)	
Mambo (variation)	
Cha-cha	
Mambo (variation)	

The bass player part also has a number of characteristic features:

1. From the other percussion instruments, in particular the lower conga, it borrows *tumbao* pattern, shown on the first line in Table 2. Once again, the syncopated beat in the three-attack first measure is synchronised with the clave pattern. In compositions for concert band, this accented beat might be doubled by *bass drum* (at soft dynamics!) and occasionally by *timpani*.

2. The *anticipation* of the first beat from the following measure, also shown in the example in the table (4th beat in 1st measure). The bass part anticipates the root of the harmony in the next measure; this raises the drive and tension in the music, since anticipation will lead to frequent dissonances between bass and other instrumentalists. For bass players in the band, such as *tuba*, *bass clarinet* or (preferrably) acoustic bass, this most likely will require a bit of habituation; at first it may lead to desperate counting of all the syncopated beats, but after a while this should converge into a more relaxed and automatic bass part performance, that will nicely contribute to the overall Latin groove.

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3. The bass part has a strong supporting role and therefore most of the time plays the lower functions from the harmonic structure (root and fifth of the chord).

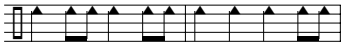
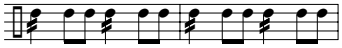
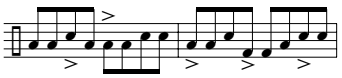
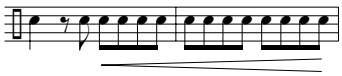
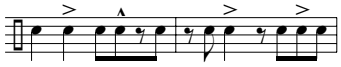
To illustrate the variability a number of other bass patterns are shown in the table. These basic patterns will be repeated over and over during sections of the piece and may lead to continuous anticipation.

Finally, although the syncopated patterns have been stressed, a number of Latin styles will require a regular two-beat bass pattern. Samples from the *mambo* and *cha-cha* styles are shown on the last lines of the table. For the band bass player these should not pose a real problem.

6 Other typical percussion patterns

To deal in detail with all the Latin percussion instruments, their playing techniques and the rhythmic patterns for all the Latin styles, would require the consultation of an exhaustive source such as [2].

Table 3: Other typical Latin percussion patterns

Instrument	Basic rhythmic cell (involving frequent repeats)
Cowbell (3-2 clave)	
Maracas or guiro	
Congas (2-3 clave)	
Break pattern (8th notes)	
Break pattern (rhythmic)	

However, a very limited set of characteristic patterns is presented in Table 3 and will be discussed. Frequently, the *cowbell* (or the other members of the bell family in the Latin percussion section) will play a regular 4-beat pattern (quarter note beats on each beat in the measure). The example in the table shows a variation, using 8th notes that wil underpin the clave pattern. Remember that patterns such as these will still require different sounds (open vs. closed) and accents from the player.

The *guiro* or *maracas* frequently apply the pattern shown on the second row: repeated long-short-short patterns that will colour a certain phrase or section of the piece at hand. This will add to a relaxed Latin groove.

For *congas* and *bongos* a pattern, such as shown on the third row in the table, is typical: subdivision of the beats into 8th note patterns, with different types of beats (fingers, palm of the hand, open vs. closed, two or three drums, etc.) and accented notes (the example stresses the 2-3 clave pattern). Frequently, in Latin band arrangements, one finds no more than quarter or 8th note *slash notation* indicating the conga parts; obviously the slash is a hint that the player is free to play modified rhythmic patterns, that support the rest of the band (add to the total effect or contrast with the rest of the band).

This brings up the topic of free, *improvised* playing by the percussion section. Obviously, sticking to the same rhythmic patterns for the full standard length of the band arrangement (roughly three minutes) is

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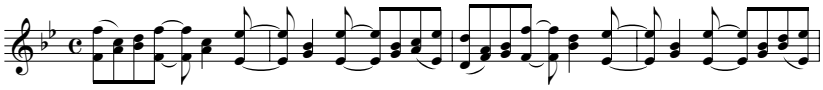
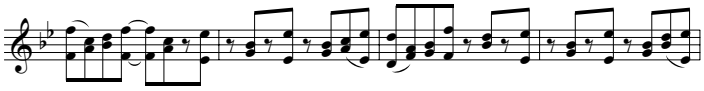
an insult to both players and audience. This style of music requires a certain freedom, that consequently is impossible to notate. A simple trick is to alter the percussion instrumentation during sections of the piece: have certain players enter and exit at the start of a new phrase or section. Although above it was stated that the effect of the Latin percussion section greatly depends on the total number of players with their interlocking pattern, this does not imply that they all will play the same instrument all the time.

Room for improvisation is obvious in the *ad lib* sections that frequently occur in Latin music. Another, less-used opportunity, is offered by the *coordinated breaks* at the end of a phrase; listening to Latin music recordings one can frequently identify *two* or *four measures closing a musical phrase*, where only the percussion plays a break as a transition to the next phrase. In classical music the percussion hardly ever has this role. These breaks are characterised by a coordination in the percussion section; each player performs an identical (or at least very closely synchronised) pattern. As band conductor or leader of the percussion section try to identify such spots in the music and *plan, organise* the break for the section (write them down or memorize); do *not* let everybody go wild over these eight beats or so. One well-known break is the simple sequence of continuous 8th notes played by everybody with a crescendo effect, shown on the next-to-last row in Table 3. An example of a more rhythmical break is shown on the last row in the table.

7 The montuno

The previous sections discussed percussion and bass parts; now the focus will shift to the characteristics of the harmony parts in Latin music.

Table 4: An example of a montuno pattern

Montuno/Guajeo	Basic montuno pattern in two parts (2-3 clave)
Notated pattern	
Actual performance	

As said above, the root of the chords usually is assigned to the bass, playing its tumbao and anticipated rhythms. The other chordal functions traditionally were played by the *tres* (a type of guitar) using what is known as *montuno* or *guajeo* patterns: repeated, syncopated arpeggio-like patterns that synchronise with the clave. Later, the piano took over this role. An example of a montuno pattern is shown in Table 4: note the frequent parallel octaves, juxtaposed with parallel thirds (the harmonic rhythm consists of one chord per measure). Look for a full discussion of montuno patterns in various Latin styles in [6].

In band music these patterns have to be assigned to other instruments. There are several solutions:

- If the band can find a sufficiently skilled *piano* or *keyboard player*, have him play the authentic montuno patterns. This requires a steady musician with a good feel for rhythmic accents and strong hands. The montuno pattern frequently is played with both hands (the left hand copying the montuno pattern at the lower octave).
- The montuno patterns should be copied in the score in both piano and wind or brass parts, adding an *a def* label in the staff. This leaves the option to assign the patterns to either instruments.

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- If the montuno patterns lie in the alto-tenor range, then *French horns* or *bassoons* are good candidates for their performance. Moving into the treble range, *muted trumpets*, *oboes* and *flutes* become more likely instruments. The *clarinets* could play these in any practical range using their characteristic timbre in either range. These instruments have the appropriate versatility to play 8- or 16-measure sequences of syncopated, arpeggiated phrases. Besides, since some of them are not part of the standard Latin instrumental groups, they will not too much disturb the authenticity of the style: open trumpets, lower brass and saxophones typically play different parts in the Latin ensemble.

Finally, the interpretation of these syncopated montuno patterns should be stressed. The first line in the table shows the standard notation for easy reading. The second line shows the same pattern, but more in accordance with the actual performance (more staccato); and on top (not yet notated) there should be the not too strong accents on all the shorter notes followed by a rest.

This concludes the basic overview of the most relevant performance aspects in Latin music for fanfare and concert band.

8 Further reading

The reference list contains suggestions for further reading (complementary to the references made in the text). Note, that most of these textbooks contain carefully prepared illustrations and photos, demonstrating the proper playing of the instruments and are published with an accompanying CD with numerous audio examples.

The *drummer* could benefit from the extensive overviews of Latin drum patterns in [1, 4, 9], the *bass player* from the overview in [10] while the *keyboard player* will discover a treasure of information in [6].

The full *percussion section* is discussed in great detail in [2, 8]. The use of Latin percussion instruments in *band* music (including many basic examples for the various Latin styles) is explained in [7].

References

[1] Dirk Brand, *1000 Faces of Drum Styles* (in German), AMA Verlag GmbH, Brühl, ISBN 3-927190-93-4, 1997.

[2] Daniel Genton, *Les Tumbaos de la Salsa*, (in French), Edition Musicales Françaises EMF 100027, I.D. Music, Courbevoie, 2000.

[3] Charley Gerhard, Marty Sheller, *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music*, New Edition, White Cliffs Media, Reno, NV, ISBN 0-941677-35-4, 1998.

[4] Siegfried Hofmann, *Das große Buch für Schlagzeug und Percussion* (in German), Voggenreiter Verlag, Bonn, ISBN 3-8024-0221-9, 1994.

[5] Isabelle Leymarie, *Cuban Fire; The Story of Salsa and Latin Jazz*, English Edition, Continuum, London, ISBN 0-8264-5586-7, 2002.

[6] Rebecca Mauléon-Santana, *101 Montunos*, Sher Music Co., Petaluma, CA, ISBN 1-883217-07-5, 1999.

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[7] Alfred Pfortner, *Der Einsatz lateinamerikanischer Rhythmusinstrumente in Big Band und Blasorchester*, (in German), Bestell-Nr. 21013, Joh. Siebenhüner Musikverlag 6082 Mörfelden-Walldorf, 1989.

[8] Ted Reed, *Latin Rhythms for Drums and Timbales*, Published by Ted Reed, FLA, 1960.

[9] Sam Vider, *The best Drum Rhythms ever written*, Lewis Music Publishing Co., Carlstadt, NJ, 1983.

[10] Paul Westwood, *Bass Bible, A World History of Styles and Techniques*, AMA Verlag GmbH, Brühl, ISBN 3-927190-67-5, 1997.

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