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Cubaneo In Latin Piano: A Parametric Approach To Gesture, Texture, And Motivic Variation

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

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Orlando Enrique Fiol

2018

Dr. Carol A. Muller

Over the past century of recorded evidence, Cuban popular music has undergone great stylistic changes, especially regarding the piano tumbao. Hybridity in the Cuban/Latin context has taken place on different levels to varying extents involving instruments, genres, melody, harmony, rhythm, and musical structures. This hybridity has involved melding, fusing, borrowing, repurposing, adopting, adapting, and substituting. But quantifying and pinpointing these processes has been difficult because each variable or parameter embodies a history and a walking archive of sonic aesthetics. In an attempt to classify and quantify precise parameters involved in hybridity, this dissertation presents a paradigmatic model, organizing music into vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures.

Cuba's pianistic vocabularies are used very interactively, depending on genre, composite ensemble texture, vocal timbre, performing venue, and personal taste. These vocabularies include: melodic phrases, harmonic progressions, rhythmic cells and variation schemes to replace repetition with methodical elaboration of the piano tumbao as a main theme. These pianistic vocabularies comprise what we actually hear.

Repertoires, such as pre-composed songs, ensemble arrangements, and open-ended montuno and solo sections, situate and contextualize what we hear in real life musical performances.

Abstract procedures are the thoughts, aesthetics, intentions, and parametric rules governing what Cuban/Latin pianists consider possible. Abstract procedures alter vocabularies by displacing, expanding, contracting, recombining, permuting, and layering them.

As Cuba's popular musics find homes in its musical diaspora (the United States, Latin America and Europe), Cuban pianists have sought to differentiate their craft from global salsa and Latin jazz pianists. Expanding the piano's gestural/textural vocabulary beyond pre-Revolutionary traditions and performance practices, the timba piano tumbao is a powerful marker of Cuban identity and musical pride, transcending national borders and cultural boundaries.

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CUBANEO IN LATIN PIANO: A PARAMETRIC APPROACH TO GESTURE,
TEXTURE, AND MOTIVIC VARIATION

Orlando Enrique Fiol

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2018

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Orlando Enrique Fiol

Dedication

To the loving memories of my maternal grandmother,

Blanca Colombina Hernández (1922-2000),

and my maternal aunt,

Jocelyn Jiménez (1943-2007).

May the following work honor these strong women's legacies of

autodidactic and eclectic scholarship.

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Research of any kind is always a collective effort with different people contributing according to their strengths. I could not have researched or written this work without many people's generosity, patience, knowledge, forbearance and practical assistance. Since, as a blind scholar, I have often required more technological and pragmatic assistance than the average sighted scholar, my list of people I must thank is somewhat long and varied.

First, I thank the University of Pennsylvania for taking a chance on my application, accepting me, and welcoming me into its music department. Six years of Benjamin Franklin funding allowed me to complete coursework and conduct research under the auspices of a generous monthly stipend. I thank our department chairs during these ten years, Jeff Kallberg, James Primosh, Jay Reise, and Anna Weesner for their sagacity in helping me navigate to changed concentrations between ethnomusicology and music theory, as well as accommodations for examinations and final papers. Profuse thanks go to Cathy Shankman, formerly of Penn's Students with Disabilities Services, for tirelessly scanning, editing, and Braille-embossing all the notated scores required for my coursework, exams, and research projects. Without Matthew Engel running around campus retrieving obscure books, purging of handwriting by hand and carrying heavy stacks on his bicycle to my home in West Philly, my last four years of research would be impossible. Thanks go to the retiring Susan Shapiro for making sure I always had a library assistant and for keeping accessibility-related communication flowing in both directions. Among my professors I especially thank Carol Ann Muller for believing in

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would have never been transformed from a sow's ear to something approximating a silk purse.

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x

depression, baffling chronic anxiety, spiritual growth, and reemergence as a blind bard
whom, I hear tell, will soon be called "Doctor".

Charlotte, North Carolina: November 11, 2018

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Over the past century of recorded evidence, Cuban popular music has undergone great stylistic changes, especially regarding the piano *tumbao*. Hybridity in the Cuban/Latin context has taken place on different levels to varying extents involving instruments, genres, melody, harmony, rhythm, and musical structures. This hybridity has involved melding, fusing, borrowing, repurposing, adopting, adapting, and substituting. But quantifying and pinpointing these processes has been difficult because each variable or parameter embodies a history and a walking archive of sonic aesthetics. In an attempt to classify and quantify precise parameters involved in hybridity, this dissertation presents a paradigmatic model, organizing music into vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures.

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As Cuba's popular musics find homes in its musical diaspora (the United States, Latin America, and Europe), Cuban pianists have sought to differentiate their craft from global *salsa* and Latin jazz pianists. Expanding the piano's gestural/textural vocabulary beyond pre-Revolutionary traditions and performance practices, the *timba* piano *tumbao* is a powerful marker of Cuban identity and musical pride, transcending national borders and cultural boundaries.

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Foreword

Sound As Home

Music is often exalted as a "universal language," a sonic grammar evoking time, space, memory, meaning, and feeling. What gets sent and received in a musical moment depends on a complex interactive system of gestures, textures, timbres, and traditions, creating a sense of mutual intelligibility for all involved. This interactive cultural/aesthetic system pivots precariously between the polarities of familiarity and unfamiliarity, what Kofi Agawu calls "home" and "away from home."¹ An anthropological understanding of culture as home usually includes geographical boundaries, language, ethnicity, folkways/mores, kinship networks, and a myriad symbolic physical objects in the enveloping environment. All these elements coalesce into stylized behavioral norms of individual and collective expression of home as culture.

However, sound in general—and music in particular—can constitute a different kind of home, one where the creative imagination provides its own possible realities. A central pitch, the tonic key, the downbeat, the cycle's beginning, closure to a central resolution, lyrical rhyme, a timbre arriving at the expected time: all are symbols of sound as "home." But sound as home is not only a familiar and comforting place, a sanctuary of resolution and repose. Home is also mobile and fluid, portable and cyclical “home” may also be scavenged from repurposed and borrowed elements forged by creative idealism

¹ Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

and curious imagination. When "home" is sound, the familiar and unfamiliar switch places as in a game of musical chairs. Culturally meaningful materials are recombined, permuted, and shifted in time and space, making familiar and unfamiliar appear in unexpected contexts. Eventually, the familiar comforts of home give way to a yearning for adventure away from home, albeit with a map back. The experience of making and interacting with music, as with any artform, is an act of trust. Senders and receivers beckon each other towards unfamiliarity, inexplicability, and even discomfort. Treading the winding paths away from and back home, a snippet of distant *song* makes its way into something new and relevant, without the creator or audience consciously aware of its origins. A rhythmic cell is shifted into syncopation, making everyone fumble for the downbeat, guessing as they listen or dance. A poetic word, artfully deployed, suddenly means something far different from what we expect, catapulting us into a new universe where we must grope to make sense of every new element or entity we encounter. Yet this tension can never last too long, lest the thread be lost and the line broken. There must always be a way back home, even when the adventure has been exhilarating and transformative. In large part, musical authenticity resides in the ability to find one's way back home to a musical tradition constantly enriched and rejuvenated by adventurous departures.

Being totally blind from birth and a musician from early childhood, sound has always been my home, my refuge from the visual world's dizzying, baffling, barely comprehensible barrage. In the absence of visual cues that contextualize so much of

"home" to the sighted, sound has consistently been a safe, creative space, a place of well being, a welcome respite from the sight-dominant world in which I so often feel disadvantaged in terms of what is visually available to most. Unable to observe nonverbal physical and behavioral differences between people—part of what we might call “culture”—I have been more powerfully drawn to the world of sound, embracing an exciting counterpoint of sounds in my "homeland," wherein painstaking musical practice, performance, and analysis have rendered me able to aspire toward rarified membership in the sound tribe of people so devoted to music that it becomes our whole life’s daily work. Unfettered by physical borders and kneejerk prejudices, I have felt at home in surprisingly variegated musical contexts, from Western classical and jazz piano, to Latin and North Indian percussion.

In all the musical environments where I have tried to establish my homestead, I have learned to distinguish between the real and fake, authentic and inauthentic, profound versus cursory understanding of the sonic organization schemas that each musical system prizes. As both a musician and theorist, defining, cultivating and maintaining musical authenticity has therefore been fundamental to all my endeavors—a way to celebrate a sonic communion with people and cultures I have come to love and appreciate through my remaining senses.

Listening with cultural “natives” to intensely memorable performances, I have learned why they murmur and cheer, nod their heads in acknowledgement or rhapsodize about memorable music for years after its sustaining echoes have faded. I have joined

thousands of Cubans and other Latinos bursting with hope and cultural pride during a performance by Los Van Van at the 2000 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, where lead vocalist Mario Rivera practically prayed for his people's survival in the song "Ay Dios, Ampárame." I have felt *timba*'s thundering climaxes at the band Bamboleo's *Sounds of Brazil* performance in New York City in 1999, each percussion and bass break piercing all earthly pretenses and shattering our stayed musical expectations. I have heard Cuban jazz pianist Chucho Valdés at a solo concert at Philadelphia's Mann Music Center catapult a sedate and polite audience from silently rapt attention to wild applause after just a few bars of a traditional piano *montuno*. My own arms have shot up into the air along with thousands of others during a *Cubanismo* concert in Camden, New Jersey, the rhythm section full of *timba* all-stars taken from the top Cuban bands.

On a deeper level, my hands have been "washed in honey and holy water" by the *orisha Ochún* of the Afro-Cuban *Lukumí* pantheon during consecrated *batá* drum ceremonies as I negotiated that ancient yet contemporary tradition on the lead drum. My face has blushed and my body has been wracked by an unmistakable intensity when Dominican *salsa* singer José Alberto "el Canario" joined Philadelphia's Charanga la Única on a boat cruise around Philadelphia, jamming on a *montuno* I had set in motion with left-hand bass and right-hand piano. My shoulders have vibrated and stung after a performance at a fancy Philadelphia hotel where my own *charanga* opened for El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, and I sat in with that legendary band on their last song, pianist/director Rafael Ithier pounding out breaks on my back.

In those moments of sonic communion, I have felt artistically and spiritually at one with everyone else participating in those moments, all of us partaking of the same bread of life and divine cup. I have witnessed the miraculous transubstantiation of abstract ideas into audible tangible sounds fashioned from whatever I've heard, imagined possible and learned to expect. Rather than tie the musics I loved to places I had never been or sights I had never seen, these sounds have become deterritorialized from physical boundaries. I have felt disparate and distant musics opening their secret doors to my ears, mind, body and emotions. In those flashes of revelation, where I felt so much affinity that I could recognize patterns across musical systems, musical universals have come alive in their sonic glory. Sound's interiors have therefore become my centripetal force, an orbit pulling away from and toward home.

These mysteriously magnetic forces have always made intuitive sense to me, the kinds of puzzles for which my ears and hands could find solutions, the kinds of logical problems I can solve on an instrument, or any finger friendly surface, instead of a blackboard or even a notated score. Without working eyes, my ears have learned to recall, reconstruct and create analyzable, verbalizable sonic sequences of musical events. The stories told in these events require no accompanying images to aid my recollection; the sounds themselves transport me to the spaces and places where I am invited to partake of a sonic feast. In this spirit, then, this dissertation is an invitation, a hearty welcome into the world of Cuban/Latin music that has become my primordial sonically constituted home.

Personal Background

If congenital blindness predisposes me toward an orientation toward sound as home, it is not the only factor. My parents, in different ways, left parts of their cultural homes to pursue far-flung creative lives. My mother left the Dominican Republic as an adolescent, became the first in her family to earn a master's degree, taught art, learned several languages, and ultimately established a thriving family therapy practice. My father, Henry Fiol, born to Puerto Rican and Italian-American parents, left the fine art world in which he was trained as a painter and became a world famous *salsa* singer/songwriter, bandleader and record producer, renowned for fusing Cuban musical aesthetics with jazz, doo-wop and Brazilian elements.

Given this creatively exploratory environment, my formative years initially resembled the gifted child trajectory. My earliest musical endeavors were encouraged, from learning Latin percussion basics from my father, picking out Christmas carols on my first beat-up upright piano, to conventional classical piano studies at the Lighthouse Music School, forays into Hindustani classical music via the *tabla*, to Afro-Cuban *batá* and other folkloric percussion. From age fourteen, I performed locally and internationally with my father's Orquesta Corazón, co-arranging, producing, and recording four albums throughout the 1990s. By young adulthood, these musical experiences, coupled with curiosity about others, began to bear fruit. I experienced the rush of playing in various Afro-Cuban ensembles, where my musical decisions pleasantly aligned with those of Cuban and other Latin musicians. The legendary masters who mentored me shared their

specialized knowledge with me, which I still pass on to students of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In graduate school, my work has been well-received in classroom seminars and academic conferences. However, as I focused on this dissertation's topic, I was confronted by the limits of what I could perceive in my research and convey in my analyses.

Sound-Centered Music Studies

Whether by necessity or what I believe to be divine design, my sound-centered scholarship stands between the disciplines of ethnomusicology and music theory. In sociocultural terms, musical systems arise from culture, shaped by nonverbal information (i.e., social hierarchies, status symbols, kinship lines, costume, and other visual markers.) Ethnomusicologists have rightfully specialized in the accurate delineation and interpretation of sociocultural phenomena, drawn upon both visual observation and musical participation (i.e., learning another culture's musical repertoires.) The result of all this nonverbal sociocultural observation and interpretation is often anthropological theorization that positions home as "culture" overlaid with music as artifact. This cultural cosmology is predicated on the assumption that sociocultural context makes music more intelligible than it would otherwise be on its own. This is presumably because most cultures contain common elements such as ritual, mythology, spirituality, history, politics, kinship, heredity, and commerce. Tied to these elements, music, as collective behavior, becomes less exotic and more relatable.

Against this model, I have felt frustratingly disadvantaged as a blind musicologist, lacking independent access to the nonvisual data taken for granted by sighted scholars, and requiring the constant translation of nonverbal phenomena into words or sounds by others. Moreover, despite the preoccupation with the politicization of visual versus aural or tactile senses, the emerging scholarly disciplines of senses/sensorium and disabilities studies seem dismayingly disinterested in the analytical biases privileging sight over other sensory centers. Disability Studies has yet to address the issue of blindness in music studies.

If ethnomusicology's fieldwork methodologies, reliant on visual observation, marginalize sound-centered scholarship, contemporary music theory analytical methodologies pose different problems. Largely concerned with *a priori* examinations of sonic structures, timbres, tunings, melody, harmony, rhythm and meter, exegetical analysis is often graphical. Whether set theory, Schenkerian graphs, or unconventional rhythmic notations such as the Tubs system, the underlying assumption is that sonic structures require graphical representations in order to be rendered comprehensible to interested readers.

Graphic analytical models have likewise excluded me. I have sat through academic seminars and conferences bewildered by the visual tracking of voice leading, Schenkerian graphs, chromatic neo-Riemannian transformations, set theory charts, dodecaphonic tone row analyses, metrical modulations and micro-timing models. Beyond the pain of inaccessibility and forced incomprehensibility, I have often mused that simply

playing extended musical excerpts would clarify everything. Therefore, whereas music theory often uses graphical representation to translate and elucidate sound, musical mastery of an instrument—for me, the piano—has been my own method of transliteration. In this sense, I am intellectually oriented toward practice-based research. Delving deeply into my chosen traditions, the daily discipline of incorporating initially foreign musical practices clarifies rather than obscures a complex array of relationships between timbres, vocabularies, repertoires and abstract procedures.

The analytical limitations of "thick [visually dependent] description" and graphical representation need not be the only rules for our scholarly game. Sounds, structures, forms, and aesthetic principles can get lost in too much cultural description, obscuring the intrinsically musical. Likewise, especially when musical systems are analyzed using etic notational or graphical systems, sound can get forced into conceptual straight jackets. Notational systems reliant on diatonic, chromatic, and equal temperament are often incapable of conveying microtonal or floating pitch subtleties. Notational systems of additive or divisive meters often limit our understanding of music containing swing, complex polyrhythmic proportions or even free meter. While contemporary analytical scholarship has risen to these challenges by extending traditional Western notational systems to transcend cultural biases, few sighted scholars have felt the need to question the supremacy of either thick anthropological description or dense notational/graphical representations. Therefore, in this work, I argue that music, as a primarily sonic art, should not preclude sound-centered analysis.

The Case for Aural Discernment

If visual observation and graphic representation were not modern musicology's principal paradigms, how would sound-centered scholarship work? What could blind musicologists contribute to a field of study in which mutating ancient and modern musical systems must be expertly compared, evaluated and historically assessed? How and why has visibility supplanted aural discernment? In the visual world, where sight so often constitutes verification, we too often mistrust what we hear, as though our ears cannot reliably deliver enough truth to our minds to be processed. Yet, many disparate musical traditions rely on aural and verbal (rather than written) taxonomies to aid preservation and transmission. The specialized aural knowledge preserved and transmitted in these musical systems is usually precise, emic and conceptually efficient, valorizing what we may term "aural discernment" as the primary articulation of musical thought. By "aural discernment," I mean the perception of musical events as both totalities and components, as momentary snapshots and gradual developments of historically underpinned and culturally informed aesthetic positions within the range of culturally accepted possibilities.

As a blind scholar, my quest for heightened aural discernment has pushed me beyond the "public" processes of interpersonal oral transmission of musical knowledge through ethnographic fieldwork through more solitary, private processes: encyclopedic listening, performative competence, and even audio signal processing (the application of sound restoration techniques such as noise reduction, compression, pitch correction, click

removal, etc., to expose specific stylistic features). All these tools amalgamate into a sound-centered understanding of culturally situated musical style, an expanded toolkit for the delineation of comparative principles across musical epochs and traditions. This expanded toolkit has enabled me to conduct the kind of sound-centered research that has made the most sense to my senses and provided me a way to perceive directly and interpret what is sonically occurring, rather than engage with sound through mediated representations.

Musical Mastery and Specialized Knowledge

Having realized early on that I could never be an ethnic Cuban, Indian, or African-American, and practically limited by my blindness, musical mastery became my path into the cultures whose musical traditions I so passionately admired. Lacking the visual markers of someone striving to blend into a physical socioculture, musical mastery became my "currency" when interacting with Cuban and non-Cuban Latin musicians, African-American gospel players, and Hindustani classical exponents, among others. My learning process helped me hone in on the most interesting questions to ask Cuban and Latin pianists directly. At times, asking overly simplistic questions can diminish credibility within the honor system in which musicians exchange specialized knowledge. A popular Cuban saying says, "*Lo que se sabe no se pregunta*" (What is known need not be asked). Put differently, "If you need to ask, you don't need to know."

I have heard many Cuban and Latin musicians dismiss ethnomusicologists as being well-intentioned but ill-informed about the workings of real life musical systems. While musicians are often flattered by academic attention, they are also guarded about dispensing trade secrets to academics who will presumably only write about them without fair compensation and never utilize them in actual musical performance. They resent giving away one's musical treasures without receiving anything in return. Given these attitudes, I am grateful for musicians' trust with their specialized knowledge, as well as my discipline's analytical vocabulary with which Cuban/Latin music's mysteries can be rendered intelligible to cultural outsiders eager to transcend a myriad of pop culture stereotypes of "exotic," "spicy" Latin passion.

Moreover, my ability to hear and integrate vital musical details has not automatically conferred authenticity within Latin music circles. Although I may play "authentically," my appearance and deportment do not always conform to pan-Hispanic cultural standards to afford me a true tangible sense of belonging. Even as a Spanish-speaking Latino-Italian-American, I have not always been embraced by Cuban musicians (on and off the island) as an ethnic or cultural insider. In my research among other musicians and academics with ambiguous cultural insider/outsider status, I have taken comfort in the truth that my troubles gaining unmitigated acceptance are not unique to me. My scholarly efforts to broaden research to include cultural outliers as equally valid voices in the Cuban/Latin musical diaspora have found me an unexpected home among other scholars, teachers, and performers who have had to find ways to escape "perpetual

student mode" or assumed inauthenticity based on academic affiliation. Rather than deter us from our musical passions and commitments, these struggles have strengthened us, pushing us to forge unique intellectual environments and contexts for self-expression, scholarship, performance, pedagogy and, ultimately, contributions to the aesthetic understanding of the ever-changing Cuban/Latin pianistic tradition.

The success or failure of a truly transculturally global musical system rests precisely in the depth and breath of the scholar's personal stake, whether performing, teaching or writing about a beloved musical tradition. The boundaries of cultural insider/outsider can only be redrawn or transcended when musicology's conventional battery of research and analysis methodologies meets the courageous determination to engage creatively through performative and pedagogical mastery—areas where some academics often fear to tread. Having devoted much of my life to musical meaning and mastery on performative, pedagogical and scholarly levels, I offer this work in the transnational, transcultural Cuban/Latin musical context, infused by my personal background values and inadvertent biases, as a template for sound-centered scholarship.

Terminology and Notation

The Cuban Versus Latin Musical Contexts

Since this dissertation historically and aesthetically contextualizes Cuban piano's ever-changing conceptualizations of an authentic Cuban sound, there are constant pendular focus shifts between the Cuban and Latin musical contexts. By "Cuban," I mean the largest Caribbean island's musical output from approximately 1920 till today, chiefly coalesced around commercial recordings, radio airchecks, and rare live bootlegs. Under the Cuban designation, I also include all musical traditions inside and outside Cuba that consciously follow Cuban musical models. By "Latin," I mean a web of musical genres and styles produced by non-Cuban Hispanic musicians in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, and the United States. These Afro-Latino genres include 1950s *mambo*, 1960s *pachanga* and *boogaloo*, 1970s classic *salsa*, 1980s-1990s *salsa romántica*, today's commercial *salsa*, and Latin jazz, first pioneered in the United States in the 1940s by trumpeter Dizzie Gillespie and Cuban *rumbero* Chano Pozo.

I insist on this Cuban/Latin distinction because it continues to be maintained by Cuban and Latin musicians themselves. Behind these two emotionally loaded terms for Cuban-based Afro-Caribbean musics lurk contentious issues of pan-Latino versus Cuban culture, musical authenticity, and national pride. Furthermore, the international "Latin" musical milieu has shifted from overt and sincere continuations of traditional Cuban models to a sense of pan-Latino pride coalescing around Cuban-derived traditions and

conventions belonging to all Latinos. I demonstrate that this Cuban/Latin ideological divide is not only over Spanish accents, slang, food, dress, race, class, politics, or history. It also involves very specific aesthetics around the creation of piano and bass *tumbaos*. In making gestural/textural and motivic decisions, both Cuban and Latin pianists draw upon their related traditions, genres, and the music of other outstanding musicians and creative visionaries.

Notation

For various theoretical and practical reasons, Cuban and Latin notation conventions have come to differ as much as approaches to piano, bass or percussion. The relevant issues mainly pertain to metrical tactus and *clave* direction. Following American jazz notation conventions, Latin music outside Cuba is usually notated in two measures of 4/4 for each *clave* cycle. This means that the *clave*'s two asymmetrical halves are notated in succeeding measures. Musicians have told me that this notation style was developed to aid jazz musicians playing in Latin orchestras who were accustomed to reading jazz in eighth notes. By notating the *clave* cycle in two measures, four quarter notes equal half a *clave* cycle. The tactus level can be augmented by notating in cut time: but this is not a widespread practice.

In Cuba, the *clave* cycle is notated in sixteenth notes, with each *clave* half receiving two quarter notes as the prevailing tactus. If the *clave* halves are notated in separate measures, the meter is 2/4; if the arranger or transcriber is comfortable choosing

a definitive *clave* orientation, each *clave* cycle is notated in a single 4/4 measure.

Notation of the *clave* cycle in a single measure has been Cuba's main notation system since the 1950s. Some Cuban musicians have quipped that sixteenth-note notation was especially valued during the early 1990s Special Period because it saved paper!

Given all the implicit issues of both Cuban and Latin notation systems, I refer to both in this text. However, since I have been limited by the availability of sighted assistants to produce notated examples, the Cuban system has been employed for all notated examples herein.

Research Methodologies

Ethnography

My ethnographic source material consists mainly of remotely conducted interviews with Cuban/non-Cuban musicians across four continents using email, telephone, and various audio/video chat applications. Remote ethnography allowed me direct contact with musicians without the pragmatic inconveniences of blind physical travel to distant lands.

Aural Discernment

Since the Cuban/pan-Latin piano tradition is largely passed on orally, I have attempted to focus my research and scholarship on the actual sounds of Cuban popular music. For this reason, I have included numerous audio examples in which I narrate with voiceovers the salient musical features being analyzed. In addition to being more blind-friendly than notated examples, these audio guides provide much more than the average excerpted score can convey. The cultivation of aural discernment through listening allows the piano to be instantly contextualized with the overall ensemble fabric, which in turn reveals key factors involved in pianistic decision making. The registers and roles played by other harmonic instruments such as bass and *teclado* (keyboard synthesizer), the percussion conversation matrix, or the interplay between lead vocalist and chorus indeed influence nearly every musical choice a Cuban or Latin pianist makes. In studying, imitating, analyzing, and ultimately assimilating these pianistic choices as reactions to the composite ensemble sound, my own pianism has improved dramatically in terms of aesthetic taste, sound judgement, and properly complementary role playing. I therefore believe that attentive guided listening is one of the best methodologies to understand the fixed and variable components within any musical system. Thus, through the cultivation of attentive and informed listening practices, the musical analyses presented here highlight audibly cross-cultural connections from timbral similarities to metrical and harmonic rotational equivalencies.

Audio Restoration and Signal Processing

As the included audio examples demonstrate, one of my main methodological tools for aural analysis has been the use of various Windows-based audio restoration and signal processing applications (Audacity, Sound Forge and various VST plugins) to enhance individual frequencies and frequency ranges, reduce surface noise, pitch correct and normalize volume. These audio mastering techniques have affected nearly every audible detail analyzed herein. Especially with historic and live recordings, compressor limiters, noise gates, graphic and parametric equalizers, frequency isolaters and clipping levelers have allowed me to hear exactly what the piano does. But I have also used remastering techniques to bring out the frequencies of Cuban popular music instruments such as the upright bass, *congas*, bongo, *timbales*, maracas, guiros and *claves*. In cases where these instruments are barely audible, my knowledge of normative sounds in Cuban/Latin popular music have guided me to expose what I know is present and achieve optimal sonic balances between instruments in Cuban/Latin ensembles.

Literature

My scholarly source material ranges from ethnomusicological articles and monographs, primarily relating to Cuban and West African musics, to music theory literature on aesthetics, sonic syntax, semantics, repetition, narrativity, improvisation and rhythm/meter theory. In terms of my focus on personal choice and individual stylistic

creativity among Cuban and Latin pianists, this study continues many of the lines of inquiry from Paul Berliner's *Thinking In Jazz* (1994) and Kathleen Marie Higgins's *The Music Of Our Lives* (1991).² Although much of the existing literature on Western classical and jazz piano/keyboard history has proven useful to the meta-issues surrounding pianistic developments in the New World, there is a paucity of scholarship pertaining directly to Cuban/Latin piano. Notable exceptions include Manuel's "Improvisation in Latin Dance Music" and Hill's "The *Conjunto* Piano in 1940s Cuba: An Analysis of the Emergence of a Distinctive Piano Role and Style."³ While these scholars cover the pre-Revolutionary Cuban stylistic elements that been amalgamated and fossilized in the transnational pan-Latino tradition, there is little close analysis of post-Revolutionary piano/keyboard styles in genres such as *songo* or *timba*. Much *timba* scholarship explores such themes as race, class, sexuality, national identity, socialism and even semiotics as they pertain to Cuban popular musics in general and *timba* in particular.⁴ This study therefore fills a void in Cuban/Latin music scholarship, focusing on stylistic musical issues using rubrics such as frames, semantic nets, and scripts.⁵

² Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Kathleen Marie Higgins, *The Music of our Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

³ Peter Manuel, "Improvisation in Latin Dance Music," in *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 127-148; and Juliet Hill, "The *Conjunto* Piano in 1940s Cuba: An Analysis of the Emergence of a Distinctive Piano Role and Style," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 2008).

⁴ See Frolicher 2005; Rubén López Cano, "Del Barrio a la Academia," *Transcultural Music Review* (December 2005); Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis* (London: Ashgate, 2005); Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, "Havana's *Timba*: A Macho Sound for Black Sex," (2006); and Vaughan 2012.

⁵ Catherine Chamblee, "Cognitive Processes of Improvisation: Performers and Listeners in the Organ Tradition and Contemporary Gospel Styles," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008).

Rather than frame Cuban/Latin musical practices solely in terms of culture or music history, I use a parametric paradigm of multiple structural levels of stasis and change, from idiomatic vocabularies to fixed compositional repertoires and abstract procedures.

Chapter Outlines

This work explores the raw musical materials and stylistic aesthetics involved in creolizing or Afro-Cubanizing the pianoforte, paying particular attention to the role individual and collective creativity plays in this process. Chapter 1 provides an overview of what the piano *montuno* has symbolized throughout Cuban popular music's history, and how each epoch's innovations have changed what it means to cultivate Cubaneo (authentic Cuban sound or “flayva”) on the piano. I explore how parametric approaches to pianistic gestures, textures, and ensemble roles can be autonomously analyzed while never losing sight of the sociocultural circumstances in which they are found. Chapter 2 is an historical overview of Cuban piano, bringing together unifying thematic principles rarely concatenated in existing scholarship: the emergence of a tripartite piano texture from Cuban classical compositions, the influence of jazz harmony, the development of a piano soloing vocabulary, as well as pragmatic factors such as modern keyboard technology and recording practices.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Cuban *clave* as a set of interrelated asymmetrical binary and ternary timeline patterns, the *clave* as a guide for Cuban/Latin popular music

songwriting and arranging, and the *clave*'s application to abstract procedures including stress, cadence, rhythmic displacement, cross-rhythm, harmonic cyclicity, and melodic phrasing. The chapter's first section makes a case for using the Cuban *clave* as an analytical tool for West African traditional musics. The second section focuses on how the Cuban *clave* governs nearly every genre and style of Cuban and pan-Latino popular music. I pay particular attention to the differing rhetoric used by Cuban and non-Cuban musicians to talk about the *clave*'s importance and its implicit aesthetic rules. I explore the cultural reasons why the non-Cuban Latin musicians discuss the *clave* more explicitly than their Cuban counterparts, adhering to the orthodoxy of strict *clave* alternation throughout arrangements, in contrast to what Cubans call "*clave licencia*" (*clave* license).

Chapter 4 presents a theoretical approach to the identification of parameters within the Cuban/Latin/Afro-Diasporic popular music cosmology. Musical events are analyzed in terms of their constituent elements on three parametric levels: vocabularies, repertoires and abstract procedures. I then break down these categories into smaller components: sounds, timbres, pulses, pitches, cells, phrases, and formulae. I demonstrate how these three levels of sounds and processes cooperate with and act upon one another to form semantic and lexical intelligibility.

Chapter 5 focuses on individual and collective creativity, both in improvisation and composition. I classify the cultural attitudes that further or hinder musical mixing along a continuum from affinity to antipathy. I analyze the processes by which Western

classical, West African, Creole Cuban, and Afro-Diasporic musical elements have been selectively repurposed, borrowed, adopted, adapted, and even rejected over centuries, both within Cuba and throughout its musical diaspora. Here, I highlight the different ways in which Cuba and its musical diaspora have pressed certain ingredients into greater service than others, depending on historical epoch, organology, and sound reproduction technologies. These judicious aesthetic choices fuel music's "mobility" through time, space, and the human imagination. Examples of this mobility include rhythmic and harmonic displacement, long-term pitch and timbre memory (recollection), disembodied quotation, composed and improvised repertoires, and cross-cultural application of abstract musical procedures. Building on the previous chapter's parametric paradigm for music analysis, I theorize that vocabularies, repertoires and abstract procedures interrelate and become combined at different levels and with varying intensities. I explore gesture and texture within the pianistic idiom, detailing how specific gestures and textures culled from Western art music, West African traditional musics, Creole Cuban and Afro-Diasporic elements fused to form Cuban popular dance musics vocabularies.

Chapter 6 introduces what I call "genre consciousness," postulating that genres are the main arena in which musical traditions and innovations can be effectively tracked. Cuban and Latin music genres systematize vocabularies and canonize repertoires. These genres privilege certain abstract procedures over others and strive to demarcate what should be included or excluded on cultural or aesthetic grounds. The genres profiled here (*rumba, nengón, changüí, son, guaracha, bolero, son montuno, mambo, and chachachá*)

all possess identifiable characteristics: average tempo, instrumentation, rhythmic approaches, cadentiality, melodic contour, harmonic progressions, song forms, and arrangements. Most important, genres in Cuban popular music are constantly intermingled, juxtaposed, referenced applied to vocabularies, repertoires and abstract procedures associated with other genres. Genre consciousness unifies the aforementioned vocabulary ingredients and theoretical principles, shaping pianistic treatment or realization decisions expected of contemporary Latin pianists involving a range of traditional and modern genres.

Chapter 7 is a case study of the transformations applied to melodic, harmonic and rhythmic features of the rural Cuban genres *changüí* and *nengón* to subsequent urban and Cuban diasporic genres: early 20th-century traditional *son*, 1940s *son montuno*, 1950s *descarga*, and *salsa* from the 1960s till today.

Chapter 8 focuses on *timba* piano's matrices for methodical gestural/textural contrast and motivic elaboration, outlining its debts to African-American funk and jazz, gestural/textural innovations and composite ensemble characteristics, especially the modular gear schemes utilized by bassists and percussionists in Cuba's top *timba* bands. I first define groove as an interlocking set of polyphonically related ensemble parts, fixed or improvised, producing a composite structure. I delineate the prototypical grooves within each section of the *son*-derived *timba* arrangement most prevalent in Latin popular dance music through its transnational and cultural history. Special attention is paid to the

montuno section, outlining different pianistic approaches to gesture, texture and registration, depending on the desired interaction with bass, percussion, other melodic/harmonic instruments and primarily call and response vocals. Here, I briefly survey different historical approaches to *montuneo* by Cuban and non-Cuban pianists, describing techniques such as *motivo* (unison passages), two-handed *tumbaos* and *guajeos* (monophonic figures doubled or harmonized between hands). I use close analyses of actual piano *montunos* culled from studio and live recordings to explicate strategies for ostinato registration, controlled improvisation, gestural/textural contrast, varied repetition and manual independence. Taking piano *tumbao* as hook and song stand-in, I compare composed and extemporaneously improvised *timba tumbaos* in terms of their gestures, textures, harmonic outlines, melodic characteristics, and approaches to motivic development. Finally, I analyze a number of *timba tumbaos*, applying Chapter 3's *clave* rules, Chapter 4's parametric paradigm, Chapter 5's ideas of creative imagination and Chapter 6's genre consciousness. Using these conceptual frameworks, I analyze how *timba* pianists use a parametric approach to pianistic gestures and textures in *tumbao* construction and elaboration.

In the Afterword I return to the themes of sound-centered scholarship and aural discernment as ways of reframing Cuban/Latin music, from associations with specific places and people to a deterritorialized tradition. I offer some reflections on how I as a blind musician-intellectual have developed sound-centered methodologies to make sense

of musical styles and aesthetics, constructing new ways of knowing and representing that are located in how we hear over how we see.

Chapter 1

Cubanidad, Cubanía, and Cubaneo:

Defining a Cuban Sound in Latin Piano

It is a cold and rainy February Sunday afternoon in South Carolina in 2018. Twelve musicians are gathered in the upstairs room of a large open house. The newly formed band, the brainchild of Javier, a Peruvian-born singer/songwriter, aims to make an unforgettable splash in the American South's rapidly expanding Latino community. The band includes two Peruvians, an Ecuadorian, a Dominican, four Puerto Ricans and two North Americans. I am the band's ethnic/racial wildcard, a Dominican Puerto Rican-Italian Cubaphile outlier, with a smoothly shaved head and wearing a heavy Indian kurta-pajama outfit. I am sitting at a cleanly amplified 61-key Yamaha Motif, generously provided by our *conguero*, along with his graciously given rehearsal space. Although the Motif's limited range precludes the piano's lowest and highest octaves, I'm making do because no one would have enjoyed lugging my 88-key Roland RD-2000 up two winding staircases.

Our repertoire is a sprawling selection of eighteen *songs*, including four of the singer/bandleader's originals. We received YouTube links to these *songs* a week before this first rehearsal. While the bassist and brass players sight read print arrangement parts, no Braille versions are made for me. Since this is my all-too-common reality in the popular music world, I have devoted considerable time and effort to the memorization of

these songs. The tunes are classic 1970s and 1980s *salsa*: Roberto Roena, José Alberto “El Canario,” Héctor Lavoe, Frankie Ruiz and others. In order to memorize and realize these arrangements by ear, I must be conversant with the extended jazz harmony primarily employed in bridges and interlude passages. To that end, I have catalogued each song’s home key and modulations. I have divided each song’s structure into typical Cuban-derived Latin music arrangement sections: introduction, verse, bridge, interlude, *montuno*, and coda. I try hard to remember all the unison piano-bass figures, as well as brass *mambos* using longer harmonic progressions than the *montuno* sections in which they appear.

I am also making mental notes regarding what and how to play through each song’s sections. During the songs’ verses, I alternate between pop-style ballad accompaniment, *bolero*-derived filigree and basic *salsa tumbaos* (ostinati). In these respects, my realizations of these arrangements do not differ from their recorded versions outside of few added decorative harmonic substitutions. But during the extended call and response *montuno* sections, rather than emulate the generic *salsa* piano patterns peppering all these recordings, I deploy a mixture of contemporary Cuban-style *timba tumbaos* (ostinati or vamps) using multiple gestures/textures, in octaves and tenths, sometimes in both hands, other times with the right hand articulating a melodic figure and the left hand filling in harmony with arpeggios and passing tones. I occasionally break these *tumbaos* with polyrhythmic chordal jabs and stabs. But most of the time, while the rest of the rhythm section articulates *salsa* mainstay *marchas* (anticipated bass,

standard *conga tumbao*, *mambo* bell or *contracampana* on *timbales* and the cowbell *campaneo*), I subtly vary my *tumbaos* with antecedent/consequent replacement, double thirds textures, repeated octaves and other variation devices well known to Cuban *timba* pianists.

Our musical director, Julio, is an excellent trombonist, a refugee from Puerto Rico's recent devastation caused by Hurricane María. He is holding down a menial job and traveling two hours for each rehearsal. Despite all his hardships, his demeanor is low key and casually professional. He hears every mistake and calls out rehearsal letters and numbers to polish up problematic passages. While the other musicians find their places among da capo signs, balls, and arrows on their printed charts, I'm softly conferring with the bassist, who says he admires my harmonic inventiveness, while I breathlessly hang onto every musical detail he provides to help me keep up. After a few undecipherably dense chromatic extended jazz chord sequences in Papo Lucca's arrangement of "Lamento de Concepción," the piano charts (of course, illegible to me) suddenly appear for the musicians, so I ask the bassist which chords are indicated.

Julio barely registers who I am, which is how I like it. Working with new musical directors, few words mean I must be doing my job well enough. Amidst this whirlwind of first-rehearsal run-throughs, I wonder if Julio knows or cares that I'm totally blind and that I've tried to memorize a glut of complex arrangements in record time. But again, his silence puts me at ease. Then, everything changes in a musical instant, as we play through

Papo Luca's astounding arrangement of Roberto Rohena's song "Lamento de Concepción," and I weave *timba*-style figurations into sequences of chromatic ii-V moves. During one of Julio's sudden stops to correct a flubbed break, a few of my last *tumbao* notes linger in the impending emptiness. Julio hears them, smiles and declares, "Ah! I like those Cuban *tumbaos*. Keep playing those." These are his first words directed toward me. But in that moment at the rehearsal of predominantly *salsa* repertoire, when Julio and I recognized each other as Cubaphilic kindred musical spirits, even the din of musicians noodling did not hinder this warmly mutual recognition. We were musical strangers thrown together to realize a bandleader's dream. But we also were, in that moment, on the same page regarding the sonic profile and musical meaning of a contemporary Cuban approach to piano *tumbaos*.

I was exposed to Cuban music early in my childhood, initially turned on to it by my father's scratchy vinyl records, then through copious collecting, friendships with Cuban musicians, two trips to Havana and scores of gigs around the northeastern U.S. Julio later remarked that he came to his love of Cuban sounds while playing opposite touring Cuban bands in Puerto Rico. Like me, Julio may have caught a few Cuban shortwave broadcasts on clear nights, or traded CDs and DVDs. Perhaps, he got to meet Hugo Morejón or Collado, trombonists for Cuban powerhouse Los Van Van. In that moment of recognition in the rehearsal, however, there was no time to ask. Julio kept things moving to the next tune on Javier's large list. Right now on this night in South

Carolina, the bandstand is my future life. So, my hands are positioned on the keyboard, and off we go!

How then did I arrive at a musical juncture where it felt right to inject standard issue *salsa* with *timba tumbaos*? Cuban music has been my passion for decades. I have spent many nights “reading” obscure Cuban musicological writings on a laptop rendered audible in software speech. I have interviewed Cuban and Latin musicians by every telephonic or computer chat medium I could use on an Android smartphone with a screen reader. I have painstakingly edited those interviews in Sound Forge or Audacity, all the while continuing to collect and remaster rare recordings. All these efforts at understanding Cuban popular music, and controlled improvisation strategies in piano *tumbaos* have catapulted me from following an unremarkable freelance performing career to academia’s hallowed halls.

This dissertation takes an analytical approach to the musical parameters, procedures and aesthetic values surrounding the formulation of a contemporary Cuban piano style, contextualizing it in both Cuban popular music history and Cuba’s musical diaspora. Ideas and discourses surrounding “authenticity” in Latin piano revolve around the musical manifestations of Cuban cultural pride on one hand, and transnational pan-Latino unity on the other. Of all the traditional and modern genres of Cuban popular dance music and its diasporic offshoots, collectively known as *Música Latina* or Latin music, Cuban *timba* is the most enduring “contemporary” genre in which a definable and

instantly recognizably Cuban approach to the piano has developed. One of this dissertation's main themes is therefore the contextualization of *timba* piano within Cuban popular music history as a set of aesthetic values and musical parameters surrounding the piano *tumbao*.

Cubanidad, Cubanía, and Cubaneo in Cuban/Latin Piano

Although both Contemporary Cuban and Latin pianists derive their sense of musical identity from various cultural, musical and even political sources, pan-Latin pianists conceive of their musical identity as being transnationally Hispanic. Cuban pianists, in large part, consider their musical identity more specifically to Cuba as a country. *Timba* piano's augmentation of traditional Latin piano's gestural/textural vocabulary therefore represents many levels of cultural assertion in the global musical marketplace. *Timba* piano's musical values are a microcosm of the entire genre. The same processes applied to the piano's vocabulary have been applied to the bass, drumset, *timbales*, *congas* and synthesizer vocabularies. At the root of these changes may reside a desire to re-Africanize or reblacken Latin music more overtly, privileging conversational contrast over literal repetition and rhythmic arpeggiation. By "conversational contrast," I mean that the *timba* piano *tumbao*'s multiple gestures and textures mimic the conversational interaction in folkloric percussion ensembles, with each piano gesture or texture functioning like a different personality or instrument participating in a musical

dialogue. Gestures and textures, however, are not the only musical characters conversing in the *timba* piano *tumbao*. Unlike previous popular Cuban genres (as well as pan-Latino and *salsa*) in which the piano *tumbao* displayed one characteristic playing style per musical section, *timba tumbaos* switch between characteristic playing styles associated with different genres, all within the space of a few beats or bars. This pianistic genre switching using gesture and texture embodies, in a musical level, contemporary *cubaneo*, a term implying proletarian street aesthetics similar to the African-American “flayva.”

This proletarian connotation to the term *Cubaneo* distinguishes it from *Cubanidad* and *Cubanía*—older, more established terms denoting Cuban national and cultural identity. *Cubanidad* specifically denotes patriotism and national solidarity, while *Cubanía* denotes Cuban cultural identity. Moreover, as various scholars discuss, musical style, while inextricably linked to Cuban cultural identity, is by no means the only cultural marker.⁶ As is the case in many urban cultures, Cuban cultural identity is manifest in slang, dress, race, class, food, rum, coffee, and cigars. From the 1920s-30s *rumba* craze, to 1950s *mambo*, to the Tropicana floor show (still performed each day at posh Cuban hotels), music has always constituted a cultural export. Since the 1990s, Cuban folklore (encompassing *rumba* and various Afro-Cuban ceremonial traditions), as

⁶ See Leonardo Acosta, *Del Tambor al Sintetizador* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1983), and *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One Hundred Years of Jazz in Cuba* (London: Smithsonian Books, 2003); Stephen Foehr, *Dancing with Fidel* (London: Sanctuary, 2001); Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanism and Artistic Revolution in Havana 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), and *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); James Robbins, “Practical and Abstract Taxonomy in Cuban Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 33 no.3 (1989): 379-89, and “The Cuban Son as Form, Genre, and Symbol,” *Latin American Music Review* 11 no.2 (1990): 182-200; and Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004).

well as the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon and *timba* have all joined the roster of state-sanctioned artistic export.⁷

Given this pattern of cultural export, how then has a stylistic piano vocabulary come to denote *Cubaneo* so indefatigably? Like most musical cultures, Cuba has many creolized instruments that are inextricably linked with national and cultural identity; these include the *claves*, *tres*, *bongó*, *cajón*, and *tumbadora* (*conga*). Although all these instruments can be traced back to Iberian or West African roots, they have undergone significant physical redesign and/or musical application in Cuba. Like many ubiquitous Western instruments such as guitar, violin, acoustic bass, flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, and trombone, the piano has not undergone physical redesign in Cuba. Instead, aspects of its playing style immediately conjure up Cuban (or at least pan-Latin) identity in the global musical imagination. This procedural divide, however, cannot be analyzed solely as a pan-Latino sport with opposing teams. Cuban and Latin pianists are increasingly fluent in each other's styles, bringing about the separation of aesthetic choices and ethnicity.

⁷ T.M. Scruggs, "Not Such a *Buena Vista*: Nostalgia, Myopia, and the Buena Vista Social Club Phenomenon Outside and Inside Cuba," *Society for Ethnomusicology* (Fall 2003).

Transcending Latin Piano Stereotypes

In the global musical imagination, Latin piano has come to possess a distinct, if caricatured, profile: right and left hands in unison or octaves arpeggiating functional triadic harmonies using syncopated rhythmic cells. So symbolic is this sonic profile that it often stands in for Latinos to evoke “Latin” music in movies, situation comedies and commercials, or any time something hot, spicy, sensual, or elicited is being portrayed. As of this writing, a popular commercial for Liberty Mutual insurance uses a low-register piano motive over an A7 chord while the 2-3 Cuban *clave* is rendered through handclaps. Other examples of Latin piano *tumbaos* in mainstream Western pop culture can be found in commercials for Southwest Airlines and various car brands, the themes for television shows *Dora the Explorer* and the 1990s *Sex in the City*, as well as scenes from the movies *Carlito’s Way* (1993) and *Scarface* (1987). In today’s cluttered online instructional video and method book marketplace, Latin jazz, *salsa*, and Cuban piano are seemingly synonymous, often reduced to a generic collection of stock rhythmic cells and chordal arpeggiations. This homogenously “Latin” caricature not only represents only one type of piano *montuno*; it is also historically inaccurate and out of touch with contemporary performance practices inside and outside Cuba.

Pattern-based *montunos*, played over virtually any tonal progression and repeated invariably, certainly have deep roots in traditional Cuban popular piano performance practices in genres such as *guaracha*, *charanga*, and *mambo*. They also became templates

for Latin jazz and *salsa* piano's recognizable thumbprint on pop culture.⁸ Yet, from its inception, the piano in Cuban popular dance music and *salsa* has required a broader skill set than the prototypical generic *tumbao* implies. Cuban jazz, *songo* and *timba* pianists have, in a broad sense, distilled and crystallized features of various genres into the contrasting sections of song arrangements.⁹ These skills, realized through specific musical choices, embody Cuban musical thought that has, to various extents, been disseminated in pan-Latino and contexts.

Over the past forty years, Cuban pianists have extended the piano's mandate, introducing the fast moving left hand, manual independence, textural contrast, gestural/textural variation, varied repetition and hyper-cyclicity, rhythmic syncopation and displacement, harmonic substitution, motivic/thematic development, and metrical modulation. However, whereas Western classical and jazz composers can often take time to imbibe and select among these techniques for their compositional aims, Cuban/Latin pianists are expected to deploy these procedures in real time, often in the “background” of simpler, more straightforward musical events such as *coros* (vocal refrains), *moñas* (repeating horn vamps) rapped passages and extended attempts to cajole crowds to raise their hands or shake their hips like whisks.¹⁰

⁸ Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishers, 2005), 44-48.

⁹ Ibid., 32-43.

¹⁰ Ibid., 151-154.

Since the piano is technically a percussion instrument, it is no accident that Cuban pianists have derived many of their most indispensable procedures from those of percussionists:

1. *Marcha*: a rhythmic pattern and its complement distributed between pianistic registers, hands or rhythm section ensemble instruments.
2. *Base*: a rhythmic/melodic/harmonic theme, a framework for controlled improvisation.
3. *Clave* play: cyclical demarcation according to the *clave* pattern and its cadential implications.

Embodying these key concepts, the piano *tumbao* is more than a rhythmic pattern or melodization of surrogate drum speech: it is at once melody, harmony, and gestural/textural conversation between both the rhythm section's members themselves and the musical personae embedded in each *tumbao*.

Salsa and Timba

As post-Cold War geopolitics have ameliorated Cuba's isolation (particularly from the pan-Latin musical world), its stylistic developments are now more accessible to pan-Latin pianists than in the past four decades. Although *salsa* and *timba* share many common stylistic foundations, their differences are sufficiently significant to warrant the taxonomy of musical parameters discussed in this work. We have seen that piano

tumbaos embodying gestural/textural contrast and motivic development may be Cuban popular music's most enduringly original features. However, linking this feature with Cuban ethnicity is inherently problematic. Despite Cuba's political/economic isolation from the United States and its Latin American allies, the trajectories of Cuban popular dance music and its pan-Latin offshoots or derivatives have actually been interacting all along, influencing each other in palpable ways. This is due to the common raw musical materials shared by both *salsa* and *timba*.

Salsa and *timba* share more similarities than differences. Both genres are based around the Cuban *clave* and follow a prototypical *song* form: introduction, verse, bridge, interlude, *montuno* and coda. In terms of ensemble instrumentation, both use many of the same instruments: piano, bass, *congas*, *timbales*, trumpets, and trombones. *Timba*, however, has made extensive use of drumset and keyboard synthesizers, while these instruments have only slowly gained popularity in *salsa*. In terms of arrangement styles and collective strategies for building intensity, whereas classic *salsa* relied more on the layering of improvised horn *moóas* and solo, *timba* uses a modular gear system in which the piano, bass, and percussion either drop out from the composite ensemble texture or change their roles. (Chapter 6 details the modular gear systems of various top tier *timba* bands.) Because of this interaction between contemporary Cuban and pan-Latin pianists, cultural insider/outsider dynamics no longer fall along ethnic or national lines.

Especially during the height of the Cold War period, both the United States and Cuban governments prohibited musicians from traveling to each other's countries, except for well-orchestrated cultural exchanges such as Típica 73's historic 1978 *Intercambio Cultural* recording with Cuban artists, the Fania All Stars' visit in 1979 (which produced a live album called *Habana Jam*) and a concert featuring Venezuelan singer/bassist Oscar de León in 1983. These rare events provided Cuban and Latin American musicians' rare opportunities to observe one another in action and jam sessions, which could not take place by just listening to smuggled recordings. This mutual interaction has instead been primarily spearheaded by Cuban and Latin musicians themselves, exchanging each other's recordings, playing opposite each other on international stages and getting together to talk shop whenever possible. During the fourteen years I worked with my father, I met many Cuban musicians who at least knew my father's name and work. I was in turn familiar with the recorded work of many Cuban musicians, especially pianists, from collecting Cuban music.

Therefore, although *salsa* and *timba* approach the piano's ensemble roles and gestural/textural vocabulary differently, Cuban and Latin musicians are generally able to act within each other's traditions. Every Cuban musician I've ever known is quite clear on *salsa*'s stylistic characteristics and can usually name their favorite *salseros*. More recently, I have found the same to be true on the *salsa* side; many *salseros* are listening to contemporary Cuban popular music, especially *timba*, drawing inspiration from its expansion of the piano's gestural/textural vocabulary. Therefore, at the heart of ongoing

stylistic exchanges between Cuban and Latin musicians lies an increasing sense of mutual musical intelligibility.

Whenever I cross paths with Cuban pianists, our mutual musical intelligibility brings us together in special moments of friendship. Once we've scoped out each other's musical mastery and stylistic fluency, we immediately discover more common musical ground than our separate cultural environments imply. I will never forget going out on a muggy Monday evening to hear Jesús Alemañi's *Cubanismo* and meeting three former members of Geraldo Piloto's Klímax, a progressive *timba* group with eclectic Latin jazz influences. After that *Cubanismo* concert, I was also fortunate to meet Rudolfo "Peruchín" Yustís III, founding pianist of José Luis Cortés iconic band, NG La Banda. Adjourning to a hotel lobby, Peruchín III and I played for each other. I asked him about specific NG piano *tumbaos*, especially "Picadillo de Soya" and he played his blues-inflected arrangement of the Cuban classic by Miguel Matamoros "Son de la Loma." Had Peruchín thought of me as a student, our musical exchange likely would not have been as profound and pianistically specific. Thirty years ago, such a sense of mutual intelligibility and even affinity between Cuban and Latin musicians was rare: now it is fortunately much more common.

Whenever I play a highly syncopated *changüí*-style piano *guajeo* with a two-octave handsread playing single notes, decorate a *bolero* with chromatic runs and rootless jazz voicings, or dig into *son montuno*'s deep slow funk with rolled left-hand chords supporting a memorably melodic *tumbao* in my right hand, I wish I had been born

enough to share a bandstand with the blind Cuban *tresero*, composer, and bandleader Arsenio Rodríguez. Whenever I hear a previously apathetic audience jump and cheer in recognition of the opening chordal *tumbao* in “Oye Como Va,” I realize that I am broadening many listeners’ conceptions of Latin piano beyond pattern-based caricatures. In those moments, I am instantly and miraculously time traveled through Cuban piano’s living sonic archive, drawing from the same musical wells of genres and recorded performances as generations of Latin pianists before me. But whenever I weave garlands of gesturally and texturally saturated variations into a *timba tumbao* performance, I am connected to an aspect of Cuban piano more primally cognitive and powerful than mere historical authenticity. Playing *timba* piano, I am connected to a real-time thought process wherein each pitch and pulse, each gesture and texture represents a micro-creative decision. My awareness of each musical event’s aesthetic implications intellectually and performatively connects me to Cuban piano by musical process rather than Cuba’s geography or culture. Through that almost telepathic, symbiotic mental affinity with Cuban pianists, our thought processes are identical despite our cultural backgrounds.

Latin music today is therefore reaching an encouraging state of mutual intelligibility and exchange in which stylistic features may no longer correspond to race, class, culture or ethnicity. I therefore interrogate whether or not the definition of “Cuban pianism” even matters today, and if it does, what it entails for Latin pianists and other musicians. Other musical traditions: Western classical, jazz and global pop, have grappled with issues surrounding ownership, appropriation and authenticity. But these

issues remain contentious in the Latin music world because claims to, and perceptions of, authenticity still carry practical consequences in regard to radio airplay, recording contracts and international touring opportunities, depending on which “faction” of the transnational Latino musical diaspora controls the game’s rules. This ongoing power struggle over aesthetic supremacy and authenticity involves a host of what I term musical protagonists or stakeholders: these protagonists, advancing their own values and goals, make music move between practice rooms and rehearsal spaces, nightclubs and concert halls, radio, television and the internet.

Musical Protagonists

Culturally speaking, the Cuban/Latin musical universe’s protagonists range from instrumentalists and vocalists, songwriters and arrangers, listeners and dancers, promoters, and radio hosts. Their complementary sociocultural roles mirror the instrumental, percussive, and vocal roles of the prototypical popular dance music ensemble. They are Cuban and non-Cuban alike, both inside Cuba and across its international musical diaspora, extending as far as South and Central America, parts of the United States with significant Latino populations, and, to a lesser extent, Canada and Europe. The pianists whose work and thought are profiled here, ply their craft in various ensemble configurations, from *timba* and *salsa* bands to Latin jazz combos, big bands

and traditional groups where the piano (*montuneo*) interacts with bass, percussion, stringed instruments, horns, and vocals.

This interaction between subsections of the Cuban/Latin ensemble can take various forms: interlocking piano and bass parts produce a polyphonic nexus of registral differentiation and simultaneity, abstractly imitating West African ensemble divisions of lead and supporting parts. The combination of piano and *teclado* (keyboard) often consists of complementary polyphonic structures juxtaposing the piano *tumbaos* with sustained pads (*colchones*), as well as interlocking patterns and timbres derived from American funk. The interaction of piano *tumbaos* with *conga*, *timba*, and drum kit parts often produces a conversational effect, with the percussion and harmonic instruments answering each other as in a *rumba* group or *batá* battery. Piano *tumbaos* outlining diatonic and chromatic harmonic progressions interact with unflagging triadic vocal harmonizations, often of a pentatonic character. Many of these effects have been present in Cuban and pan-Latin musics for decades; these include the harmonic layering of piano, bass, and *tres* in the 1940s *conjunto* of Arsenio Rodríguez or the interaction piano and violin *guajeos* characteristic of 1950s *charangas* such as Orquesta Aragón, La Sensación and La Sublime.¹¹ Others have their roots in experimental 1970s Cuban groups such as Los Van Van and Irakere. Still others take their cues from funk groups including Earth Wind and Fire, Parliament Funkadelic, and Kool & the Gang. Cuban and Latin pianists, aware of the cultural ramifications of specific rhythmic phrases, harmonic progressions,

¹¹ Hill, "Conjunto Piano."

timbres, gestures and textures, make choices using a mixture of sociocultural and abstractly creative criteria. Moreover, Latin pianists' ensemble responsibilities toward the overall success or failure of each musical endeavor do not map precisely to sociocultural status, prestige, notoriety, or remuneration.

Many Latin pianists appear to be toiling behind the scenes in relative obscurity, sometimes taking over from previous legendary innovators, other times recording as session players with no expectation of tenure. Some are also arrangers, while others find a valuable niche in arrangement realization. Some notate everything they play, while others barely read music fluently. The Cuban/Latin musical milieu, by choice and necessity, has benefitted from a flexible and embracing attitude towards ideas of authenticity, privileging musical mastery over seemingly automatic cultural inheritance. However, upon separating authenticity from ethnicity, the nature of *cubaneo* takes on different shapes, spanning epochs and environments. The piano's various ensemble roles, participating in different genres and arrangement types, lay at the heart of what it means to cultivate a Cuban sonic aesthetic.

The Cuban/Latin Sonic Archive

There is indeed a Cuban/Latin analog to the canons and archives found in other musical traditions, whether enshrined in ancient manuscripts or preserved through generations of aural/oral transmission. Although the Cuban/Latin musical tradition has always used notated scores to represent arrangements, we play much more than any score

specifies. Raised on the Western classical piano repertoire tradition working from venerated notated scores, we have been taught to make interpretive choices regarding dynamic shadings, attack, voicing, pedaling, phrasing, and rubato. But in the Cuban and Latin contexts, interpretive and compositional choices are not delegated to performers or composers. Thus, **what** we choose to play is materially inseparable from **how** we play. Even when realizing notated arrangements, so many concrete performative choices are expertly juggled in real time that we are not merely interpreting others' compositions; we are composing extemporaneously in real time from a deep grounding in our musical history. Our senses of memory and musical traditions live within our minds, hands and hearts. The archive's materiality is preserved through generations of thoughts made real by hands and fingers, each repeating, revising and even rejecting aspects of the tradition. These strings of momentary aesthetic choices keep our archive alive rather than locked in anachronistic speculations over historically informed authenticity.

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Defining Terms: *Montuno*, *Guajeo*, and *Tumbao*

At the core of the structural and gestural/textural differences between contemporary Cuban and pan-Latin pianism is the repeating ostinato section, called *montuno*, *guajeo*, or *tumbao*. Although Cuban and Latin musicians often use these three terms interchangeably, they contain historically subtle nuances.

1. *Montuno* (literally “mountainous”) refers to the repeating *estribillo* (refrain) portion in many Cuban musical genres, especially *son*, *son montuno* and *guaracha*. *Montuno* can refer to a repeating harmonic

progression, a generic arpeggiated rhythmic pattern outlining that progression, or a song-specific part atop that progression.

2. *Guajeo* is an older term than *tumbao*, referring to a song-specific melodic line over a repeating harmonic progression. *Guajeo* connotes a melodic line reduceable to a single voice, even if it is doubled or harmonized in performance.
3. *Tumbao* refers to any repeating pattern played by the rhythm section during a *montuno* section. *Tumbao* can refer to the anticipated bass or other stock rhythmic cells (*tumbaos de bajo*), as well as a piano *montuno* (*tumbao de piano*). In *salsa* terminology, the basic conga pattern is called *el tumbao*.

Montuno as Form, Style and Process

Since so much time and effort in Latin music arrangements and performances is given over to many kinds of *montuneo* (the performance of *montuno*) *montuno* as form, style, and process forms the foundation of my thinking in this dissertation. *Montuno* generally is simultaneously a site for rhythmic intricacy, harmonic delineation, and melodic memorability. For Hill (2008), the crystallization of the Cuban piano *montuno* style during the 1940s fundamentally changed the piano's rhythm section roles.¹² In addition to a distinctly Afro-Cuban approach to the piano's participation in compositely

¹² Ibid.

interlocking ensemble textures, the types of *montuneo* first developed in the 1940s have not only formed the bedrock of *salsa* piano, but continue to nourish more contemporary Cuban genres such as *timba*.

Montuno as Form

How are *montunos* created from scratch? Which musical characteristics lay at the heart of *montuno*? The answers are linked to historic Cuban conceptualizations of the *montuno*'s origins and realizations in performance. Aurally surveying a century of Cuban recorded music history and attempting to inform my playing with its *lessons*, I had to learn to distinguish between *montuno* as musical gesture, stylistic treatment, and developmental process. Only then could I pinpoint exactly why Cuban and pan-Latin *montunos* continue to sound so different from each other. On the surface, the differences between types of piano *montunos* can be hard to hear, let alone reproduce. From 1940s *sonmontuno* and *guaracha*, to 1950s *mambo* and *charanga*, 1970s classic *salsa* and contemporary *timba*, octave doubling and harmonic arpeggiations predominate as stylistic features. This is why *timba* pianists are quite proud of their *tumbao* creations containing single-note and chordal textures instead of octaves, or melodic elaboration rather than literal harmonic appreciation.

From within Cuba's recorded musical history and listening to archival musician interviews, four main historical forms of *montuno* emerge:

- (1) *montuno* as an instrumental realization of a vocal melody
- (2) *montuno* as rhythmicized melody
- (3) *montuno* as harmonic outline
- (4) *montuno* as compliment to other musical elements such as vocal refrains or brass *mambo* figures

(1) *Montuno* as an instrumental realization of a vocal melody. Even today, *montunos* in unison with *coros* (vocal chorus refrains) trace their origins to nineteenth-century rural Cuba, where the *tres montuno* followed a vocal line in exact unison in the *changüí* genre family.¹³ These *montunos* tended to be the most overtly melodic rather than harmonic, since they contained many diatonic passing tones. The late Cuban musicologist Danilo Orozco extensively recorded the oldest living members of the Valera Miranda family in the *Integrales del Son* project.¹⁴ Many of these elders were centenarians who had lived through Cuba's war of independence against Spain. In songs such as "El Águila" and "Castellano, qué Bueno Baila usted," the *tres guajeos* move in unison with the vocal melodies and syllabic text declamation. The earliest *son* recordings of Sexteto Habanero in 1918 display this same characteristic of unison motion between voice and *tres*.

Montuno as unison extends outward from rural to urban Cuba and can be found in

¹³ Benjamin Lapidus, "The *Changüí* Genre of Guantanamo, Cuba" *Ethnomusicology* 49 no.1 (2005): 50, 58, 68.

¹⁴ Danilo Orozco, *Integrales del Son*, 1989, 1999.

traditional *son*, *son montuno*, *charanga*, and *songo*.¹⁵ In Arsenio Rodríguez's 1940s-1950s *conjunto son montuno* style, the *tres*, piano and bass regularly doubled the *coro*, as in "Tumba Palo Cucuyé" (1948) or "Guaragüí" (1952).

(2) *Montuno as rhythmicized melody*. At a lecture/demonstration in Las Palmas, the Canary Islands Cuban virtuoso *tresero* Pancho Amat offers two intriguing hypotheses regarding the relationships between rhythm, melody, and *montuno*.¹⁶ First, he contends that the trochaic stresses of Spanish words such as *mira*, *oye*, *anda dime*, and *cosa buena* inspired the highly syncopated characteristic of *changüí*, an influence that would endure through the 1940s to 1950s multilayered syncopated *mambos* of Pérez Prado and Bebo Valdás. These syncopated *mambo montunos* in turn became *salsa*'s bedrock and have come to stand for Latin piano in the global musical imagination.

Second, Amat contends that the earliest *montunos* were rhythmically syncopated settings of Iberian folk and Western classical melodies.¹⁷ This hypothesis is born out in many New World genres such as the Cuban *danzón*, Brazilian *choro*, and American ragtime, in which European-derived melodies, harmonies, and structural forms are outfitted with West African-derived rhythmic syncopations. This melodic rhythmization is facilitated by the phenomenon of what Gerstin and Dalluge call "rhythmic suspensions

¹⁵ Hill, "Conjunto Piano," 51, 73, 81, 177.

¹⁶ Pancho Amat, "Clase en Las Palmas," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybeQhMcgc2K>, accessed 5 November 2018.

¹⁷ Ibid.

and planes.”¹⁸ I call this “syncopated isochrony” because rhythmically isochronous (evenly spaced) phrases in Cuban folkloric and popular musics often syncopate without disturbing their isochrony. One of Latin piano’s most iconic rhythmic cells [X0xx 0x0x 0x0x 0x0x], associated with *mambo* and *salsa* piano, contains eight syncopated isochronous pulses.

(3) Montuno as harmonic outline. For Hill, 1940s *conjunto* piano fell along a binary axis between *guaracha* and *son montuno*.¹⁹ In her analysis as well as those of many other Latin musicians I have asked, *guarachas* were faster and simpler than *son montunos*, and were mainly played by “white” *conjuntos* such as Casino and Kubavana. By contrast, 1940s-1950s *son montuno* was much slower than *guaracha* and was mainly played by “black” bands such as Arsenio Rodríguez, Rená Álvarez and Félix Chappottín.²⁰ I concur with Hill’s analysis of typical *guaracha* stylistic features: staggered anticipation, chordal and octave reinforcement, rhythmically static *montunos*, and pedal notes. While these features define *montunos guaracheros* to this day, Hill’s analysis does not position the *son montuno/guaracha* binary within the aforementioned *montuno* forms. With the analytical framework of these *montuno* forms in place, it becomes apparent that *guaracha* piano *montunos*’ main function is harmonic outline, whereas *son montuno* piano is largely motivic, often doubles the *coro* and is played in the piano’s low-mid register.

¹⁸ Julian Gersten and Ken Dalluge, *The Musician’s Guide to Rhythm* (North Shire Press, 2014).

¹⁹ Hill, “*Conjunto* Piano.”

²⁰ Ibid., 189-233.

Guaracha tumbaos allow for more varied treatments than *son montuno* because they are not as focused on melody and motif as *son montuno tumbaos*.

Beneath the array of possible pianistic gestures and textures associated with different Cuban/Latin popular music genres is the fundamental principle of harmonic rhythm. One of the Cuban/Latin pianist's main tasks is the realization of the aforementioned *montuno* types over different harmonic progressions changing in different places during the *clave* cycle. Cuban pianist César "Pupy" Pedrosó, founding member of Los Van Van, distinguishes between *tumbaos* with harmonic changes aligned to or after the *ponche*. In international notation, the *ponche* is beat 4; in Cuban notation, it is beat 2&. It is the most ubiquitous type of anticipated bass found throughout Latin America. However, when used on both sides of the *clave* (see Chapter 2), the *bombo ponche* anticipated bass pattern proves to be only a half *clave* in length. This means that it coincides with the *clave*'s pulses only on the 3-side.

The *bombe ponche* or anticipated bass pattern is one of *guaracha*'s most enduring legacies, although the figure also penetrated *mambo* and later *salsa*. However, even while that pattern's primacy was being established, Arsenio Rodríguez innovated a slightly different harmonic rhythm scheme for *son montuno*. Rather than the half-*clave* *bombo-ponche tumbao*, Arsenio shifted the bass notes from 4 (2&) to 4& (2e and 4e) on the *clave*'s pickup to the 2-side. The net result was a harmonic rhythm whose anticipated changes occurred once on the 2-side pickup and once right on the 3-side's last pulse.

Establishing where in the rhythmic cycle new chords are to occur affects the types of gestures and textures the piano can use in precomposed and improvised *tumbaos*. It affects how many arpeggiated pitches are expected over each chord, how passing chords such as secondary dominants and diminished sevenths can be deployed. *Timba* has taken the anticipated bass' implicit harmonic rhythm to the next logical level, using piano and bass *tumbaos* without regularly spaced harmonies sounding on specific beats in the *clave* cycle. These usually follow the bass' highly syncopated and pointillistic style, thereby causing harmonies to change 2e, 3e and 4a (in Cuban notation).

4) *Montuno* as complement to other musical elements such as vocal refrains and brass *mambo* figures. As I previously observed, one of *timba* piano's distinctive features is the rhythmic, registrally and harmonically complementary between left and right hands, with the left hand often arpeggiating harmonies underneath the right hand's mid-upper register speaking notes. Cuban piano *montunos* as early as the 1940s were already exhibiting both internal and ensemble interlock.²¹

Based on my interviews and conversations with Cuban *timba* pianists regarding internal and ensemble interlock, I maintain that both interlocking styles are micro and macro versions of the same phenomenon; namely, the piano *montuno* as complement or contrast to existing musical elements within the ensemble. These contrasts may be registral, as when the three to four octave spread between the piano's right and left hands

²¹ Ibid., 30-33.

positions the right hand as one of the highest sonic frequencies in the ensemble's composite frequency profile. The contrasts may also be motivic or thematic, as when the piano *montuno*'s speaking notes occupy the rhythmic spaces left by *Coros* or *mambos*. The contrasts can also be harmonic, as when the piano *montuno* independently outlines a related harmonic variant to the overall progression. Finally, these contrasts may be rhythmic, as when the piano *montuno* introduces triplets, syncopations, and cross-rhythms that contrast with more regular rhythmic patterns throughout the ensemble.

Montuno as Process

Having provisionally defined *montuno* types, roles, gestures and textures, I turn to the piano *montuno* as process. First, regardless of genre or era, the piano *tumbao* has always tended to be improvised, which explains the paucity of notated piano *tumbaos* alongside scores and parts for arrangements. Whether literally repeating, as in pre-Revolutionary traditional genres, or developed in post-Revolutionary *songo* and *timba*, the *tumbao* as process ultimately rests within each pianist's head, hands and heart. Even when interpreting a predecessor's *tumbaos*, each new pianist is expected to apply procedures of motivic development and gestural/textural variety to pre-existing *tumbaos*. This is *montuno* as process.

Cuban/Latin piano's historical overview overtly concerned issues of cultural authenticity and appropriation. But underneath, the main issues were in fact musical.

They involved the types of gestures and textures the piano *montuno* could use, the way of accompanying largo sections, the use of simple triads and seventh chords versus jazz-inflected flat-nine, sharp-nine, suspended-eleventh, and thirteenth chords. Besides these abstractly musical concerns, Latin pianists have been constantly grappling with the question of whether it is important to cultivate and maintain *Cubaneo* or whether Latin piano's stylistic vocabularies in fact belong to everyone. Given the cyclical nature of piano *tumbaos* in relation to their harmonic progressions, the Cuban/Latin pianist has various options in performing each piano *montuno* or *tumbao*. If its exact textural treatments have been worked out in advance, they can be literally repeated, slightly varied using rhythm, motif and harmonic substitution, or they can be used as themes for garlands of variations that are never identical between harmonic or *clave* cycles.

Having briefly outlined the Cuban/Latin pianist's array of parametric possibilities in crafting and playing piano *montunos*, it becomes clear that many factors govern musical decisions. Genre and era impose textural restrictions, especially in terms of register and decoration. Ensemble instrumentation may influence the amount of filler notes or the accentuation of the *tumbao*'s speaking notes. *Montuneo*'s parametric procedures are, therefore, influenced by aesthetic, musical, and cultural considerations. This is why the processes involved in *timba tumbaos* have tended to polarize Cuban and Latin pianists along ethnic and cultural lines. Thus, the pianist's parametric choices may mark them, if not ethnically, then at least aesthetically in terms of adherence to the Cuban or pan-Latin pianistic approaches. When I articulate the same musical gesture using

different motivic and textural treatments, I do not necessarily feel I am making statements of Cuban pride, since I am not ethnically Cuban. Rather, I am making aesthetic statements about which procedures I think are best in different musical circumstances. In my mind, the fact that *timba* comes from Cuba is incidental.

The Practitioner Researcher and Auto-Ethnographic Models

I have thus far hypothesized that Cuban/Latin piano can indeed be reduced to quantifiable vocabulary gestures and textures, as well as abstract procedures involving signature features from different genres, extended jazz reharmonizations and keyboard languages drawn from black American funk, gospel and fusion jazz. Since different sections of Latin music arrangement prompt the pianist to choose between possible treatment options, balancing the piano's ensemble role against those of the bass, percussion, vocals and horns, though initially daunting, can be learned and practiced to a high standard. While this may benefit musicians, scholars face what may be called a translation dilemma. Even well-educated musicians often lack the interest in, or necessity of, a language to articulate their musical thoughts and choices.

During my interviews with dozens of Cuban and Latin musicians, I often asked, “Why do you do this? Why play that?” In many cases, such questions elicited frustratingly vague answers. For many musicians whose reputations hinge upon individualized knowledge, specific musical answers to technical questions equate to the

divulgence of trade secrets. This mentality may have its roots in the syncretic secretism associated with Afro-Cuban spiritual traditions such as Santería and Palo. As a consecrated *batá* drummer for twenty-two years, I recall my struggles obtaining reliable information regarding drum rhythms, variations, decorations, flourishes, interpolations, and song texts. Secrecy extends from herb preparations and animal sacrifices to initiations and divination. For many priests and elders in these religions, secrecy meant more godchildren and respect within the community, which in turn meant a better living standard. However, as Stephan Palmié points out in his 2013 monograph *The Cooking of History*, the demarcation lines between insider practitioners and outsider anthropologists have often been blurred to the point where “culturally white” Cubans have attained as much legitimacy and renown as Cuban blacks.²² Palmié also argues that anthropological literature such as the works of Fernando Ortiz or Lydia Cabrera has often served practitioners as an archive of “trade secrets” that they or their ancestors revealed to scholars.

In the Cuban/Latin popular music world, many of the same attitudes toward “trade secrets” persist. Interviewing my father for this work, I was admonished not to write about many of his compositional procedures because they include trade secrets that other songwriters, arrangers or bandleaders would presumably steal. Yet, in his fifty-year career, with my father’s “trade secrets” becoming international hits, no one else has

²² Stefan Palmié, *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 78-112.

sought or been able to copy his most prized procedures. During my formative years of musical apprenticeship, I made innumerable mistakes whose rectifications would have involved trade secret revelations. Finding out what was valued became a circuitous journey requiring seemingly infinite time and patience. Some people simply didn't want to talk; others wish they could talk but don't know how. Either way, the cracking of guarded codes, leading to musical mastery, is one of the best entry paths into soundworlds where words are often inadequate descriptors.

Musicians and scholars eager to enter this aesthetic world must therefore learn a musical "language" of aesthetically informed gestures and textures, often without an accompanying verbal guide. In fact, Latin pianists have developed "workaround" methods to achieve musical mastery without explicit verbal guidance. These methods, when concerned with historical styles, resemble jazz musicians' methods of slowing down recordings and copying licks.²³ With living exponents, transmission methods often involve physical observation of pianists' moves and manual techniques during live performances and recording sessions. More recently, internet videos and method books have provided new pathways to musical mastery. However achieved, musical mastery provides distinct advantages for scholars, teachers and performers.

In mastering musical performance, the relevant vocabularies, abstract procedures and repertoires become a common sonic "language" between cultural "insiders" and "outsiders" to a common standard. But rather than the insiders only providing imitative

²³ Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, chapters 1 and 5.

examples, and the outsiders filtering the assimilated information through anthropological or philosophical lenses, everyone involved is thinking similarly about the same music, playing it to high aesthetic standards, teaching and recording it. The music's sheer sheets of sound provide the forum in which emic and etic vocabularies interact. Insiders and outsiders alike intersect at the sonic summit of mastery. Over time, fully immersed in the Cuban piano tradition, even cultural “outsider” practitioners can become co-guardians of specialized knowledge. In their interactions, researcher and researched become fused, exchanging roles instantly, one researching, the other being researched, both researching, both being researched, epistemologies dancing with one another to a hard-won tune.

Chapter 2

Historicizing Authenticity in Latin Piano:

A Transcultural Transnational Journey of the Solo Piano Tripartite Texture

The first murmurings of the piano's possible roles in Cuban popular music have their roots in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Cuban art music, through composers including Saumell, Cervantes, Lecuona, Caturla, and Roldán, after whom Cuba's prestigious music conservatories are named. These composers fused Cuban folkloric music's rhythmic cells and popular melodies with Western classical compositional motivic development and chromatic harmony techniques. More important, these Cuban classical composers, especially in their *danzas*, *contradanzas*, and character pieces, collectively produced a tripartite piano texture: left-hand bass lines alternating with mid-register chords (similar to stride piano), and right-hand melodic material. In certain pieces, the right hand contains two contrapuntal voices: melody and countermelody. Yet, unlike stride piano, the left-hand bass-chord accompaniment did not follow a steady "oom pa" pattern: Cuban rhythmic cells were used instead. These rhythmic cells included *cinquillo*, *clave*, amphibrach, and melodic figures from *contradanza* (a Creolization of the French *contradanse* and precursor to the *danzón*).

This tripartite piano texture has remained in Cuban popular music till this day. It can be heard in the two-handed *montuno* style on Arsenio Rodríguez's early recordings from 1940 to 1943. It is present on Cuban pianist/bandleader Antonio María Romeu, both

with his *charanga* and in solo performances. Many of the left-hand bass-chord patterns were divided among saxophones and trombones in jazzbands such as Amaranto y su orquesta Copacabana, Casino de la Playa, Julio Cueva, Dámaso Pérez Prado, and Bebo Valdeás. These accompanimental formulae are also prominent in Machito and his Afro-Cubans during the 1940s. These same bass-chord formulae can be found on such classic *salsa* recordings as Bobby Valentín's "Soy Boricua" (1973) and Ray Barretto's version of the traditional *changüí* "El Guararé de Pastora" (1976), both analyzed in chapter 6. Most recently, a number of Cuban jazz pianists including Emiliano Salvador, Jesús "Chucho" Valdés, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Iván "Melón" Lewis, and Yoel Díaz. Even as part of *danzonete*-style pieces or versions of classic *danzones*, this tripartite texture conveys a bygone elegant *Cubanía* of salons, balls, and chaperoned dances.

Early Piano Vocabularies

The piano began entering popular music at the turn of the twentieth century, in *zarzuelas*, *danzones*, art songs, and theatrical performance.²⁴ By the late 1920s, recordings reveal the piano primarily in a decorative role, providing elaborately embellished accompaniment to *danzones* and *boleros*.²⁵ But by 1940, it would be incorporated, along with the *tumbadora* (conga drum), into the *conjuntos* of Arsenio Rodríguez, Casino, Casino de la Playa and Sonora Matancera, as well as numerous *charangas* such as Antonio Arcaño y sus Maravillas and Melodías del 40. During the

²⁴ Moore, *Music and Revolution*, 39-41.

²⁵ Hill, "Conjunto Piano," 98-108.

1940s and 1950s the piano's vocabulary was forged from Western classical, jazz, and Cuban folkloric elements, which required a culturally grounded familiarity with many Cuban genres and instruments.

Jazz Influences

The jazz piano vocabulary innovated by Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson and filtered through the imagination of one Luis "Lili" Martínez Griñán, established an enduring presence in Cuba. Many elder Cuban musicians recall regular performances by jazz giants Nat King Cole, George Shearing, Louis Armstrong, Dizzie Gillespie, Zoot Sims, Stan Getz, and Philly Jo Jones. These performances were regular events during the 1950s at Havana's upscale hotels, resorts, and gambling casinos owned and controlled by American corporations and organized crime syndicates. Cuban musicologist Leonardo Acosta documents this largely unrecorded history with great detail in his 2003 monograph, *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One Hundred Years of Jazz in Cuba*.²⁶ In addition to the tourist milieu, Cuban jazz could be found in dozens of cafés, bars and largely clandestine jam sessions.

Meanwhile, in the United States, hotels and resorts such as the Catskills in New York State, catering to a largely Jewish clientele, often booked Cuban and Latin jazz combos made up of white, black, and Latin musicians from various countries. My father got his start playing conga in the Catskills. Other New York and elderly Cuban musicians

²⁶ Acosta, *Cubano Be*, 6, 22, 35, 50, 55-56, 59, 65, 78, 81-82.

recall their experiences playing such resorts with the preeminent big bands of the time: Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez, Machito and his Afro-Cubans, even Xavier Cugat and Pérez Prado. Thus, the 1940s and 1950s witnessed frequent musical exchanges and collaborations between American and Cuban musicians, particularly pianists. Furthermore, beginning in the 1950s, the genre of *piano con ritmo* (piano with Afro-Cuban rhythm section) was popularized by the Puerto Rican pianist Luisito Benjamín and Cuban pianists Pedro “Peruchín” Yustnís and blind pianist Frank Emilio Flinn. Their repertoire often included jazz standards and traditional Cuban compositions, emphasizing the piano solo. Unencumbered by brass sections, flute, or violins, *piano con ritmo* provided Latin pianists with the perfect forum to stretch out during their solos.

The Piano Solo

As Hill documents, the piano’s presence in Cuban popular music during the 1920s and 1930s in genres such as *danzón* and *bolero*, was mostly decorative.²⁷ The octave figurations, chromatic runs, and symmetrical chord/scale patterns provided the ideal musical vocabulary for the emerging piano solo. Influenced by jazz pianists, Cuban pianists Jesús López and Lili Martínez developed a piano solo style abundant with fast octave scales, runs, and contrary motion chordal formulae. These developments may have been facilitated by the slow tempi of *danzón* and *son montuno*, in which the piano could concentrate on sixteenth notes, 16th-note triplets and 32nds. However, as *guaracha* and

²⁷ Hill, “*Conjunto Piano*,” 21-22, 28, 91-95.

mambo's faster tempi gained favor with Latin dancers, the piano's soloing vocabulary shifted from an emphasis on ornately florid fillagree to sparser phrases imitating Afro-Cuban percussion.

In 1960s New York, pianist Eddie Palmieri furthered this Latin jazz piano fusion by incorporating tone clusters, dissonances, and sparse phrasing associated with Thelonious Monk, Cecil Taylor, and Sun Ra into his piano solos with *La Perfecta Combinación*. In 1970s Puerto Rico, pianist/arranger Papo Luca (especially within *la Sonora Ponceña*) updated the 1950s *piano con ritmo* vocabulary of octave passages and chromatic runs with a decidedly single-line bebop soloing approach popularized by jazz pianists such as Bud Powell, Lennie Tristano, Al Haig, Tommy Flanagan, and Eroll Garner. This single-line bebop approach to the Latin piano solo vocabulary lightened the piano's typical texture of nineteenth-century "Romantic" piano in the "grand manner." These jazz influences on the piano solo indubitably augmented the piano's ability to navigate rapidly changing chromatic harmonic progressions.

Montuneo

Given the ideal circumstances for the piano solo's proliferation, it is easy to see why most Cuban/Latin pianists focused great energy on solos. When Latin pianists exalt our 1940s-1950s pantheon of legendary players such as José Curbelo, Lili Martínez, Charlie Palmieri, and Rubén González, we mostly think of piano solo rather than *montuneo*. *Montuneo* is represented by a different pantheon focused on different musical

aesthetics than what the Latin piano solo typically handled. Growing up with New York musicians and asking them which pianists I should study for their *montuneo*, I was often directed to Lino Frías (pianist of Cuba's *Sonora Matancera*, especially during singer Celia Cruz's era) Rafael Ithier (founder of El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico), "Mantecón" (pianist for Cuban legend Benny Moré's Banda Gigante) and Nené (pianist of Cuba's *charanga* Sensación and father of the aforementioned César Pedroso). A dualistic conception of Latin piano was in evidence, exalting the solo and relegating *montuneo* to the perpetuation of Cuban piano tradition.²⁸

During the past two decades of Cuban popular music, however, the piano *montuno*, its gestures and textures broadened by *timba*, has finally taken center stage at the hands of pianists such as Tony Pérez, Ivan "Melón" Lewis, Sergio Noroña, Rolando Luna and Tirso Duarte. These innovators have drastically expanded *montuno* beyond stock patterns and single uniform registral textures. Rootless voicings, in the styles of Bill Evans, McCoy Tyner, and Herbie Hancock, have replaced purely triadic harmonic outlines, especially in the left hand. The octave texture, so common before the 1980s, has been expanded to include various arpeggiation formulae, triadic declamation, and harmonizations in thirds, sixths and tenths.

²⁸ Manuel, "Dance Music."

Tradition and Innovation

It is difficult to ascertain whether Cuban piano's assimilation of jazz harmony and development of an enduring piano soloistic vocabulary were indicative of any specific cultural phenomena other than a cosmopolitanism worldview and pianists' exposure to different musical traditions. Rather, it seems that Cuba and its musical Diasporas (New York, Puerto Rico, parts of Colombia, and other pockets throughout Latin America) have handled tradition and innovation quite differently. During the 1940s and 1950s, with the piano's stylistic vocabulary, ensemble roles and procedures crystallizing, Puerto Rican and Latin American musicians interpreting Cuban music mainly sought stylistic accuracy over individuation. Cuban musicians active during the 1940s and 1950s, including singer and bandleader Mario "Machito" Grillo and percussionist Orestes Vilató, considered Nuyoricans to be largely on par with, or even superior to, Cubans in terms of their adherence to a Cuban musical authenticity. Historic recordings from this era indeed evince a near indistinguishability between Cuban and Puerto Rican pianists. During *montuno* sections of arrangements, one hears a two-handed *montuno* style, with bass lines and chords in the left hand and *guajeo* figures in the right. In *boleros* and up-tempo song strophes, one hears diatonic and chromatically symmetrical runs in either hand, or often in both hands, either in parallel or contrary motion. Solos abound in cascading octaves and interlocking runs, chordal realizations of melodic lines and jazzy harmonic progressions along the cycle of fifths. One also hears the piano melodizing signature

phrases from Cuban folkloric genres (such as *rumba* and *changüí*) and even ceremonial genres (such as *Lukumí* and *Abakuá* songs and drum rhythms).

By the early 1970s, *salsa*—considered to be an intergenral marketing concept hatched by Johnny Pacheco and Jerry Masucci—presented a spurious alternate mythology to Latin music's Cuban origins in its feature documentary, *Salsa*, suggesting that the music was beamed directly from Africa to New York. During this period, recordings reveal growing developmental differences between Cuban and non-Cuban pianists.

In Cuba, pianists such as César "Pupy" Pedrosó (cofounder of Los Van Van) and Jesús "Chucho" Valdés (cofunder of Irakere), experimented with electronic instruments such as Fender Rhodes and Farfisa Organs, and injected prominent references to American psychedelic rock, pop, soul, R&B, and fusion jazz. Meanwhile, in the U.S. and Latin America, *salsa* as a "dialect" genre crystallized around *guaracha* and *mambo*-derived stock piano *montunos*. Although innovators such as Eddie Palmieri, Papo Lucca, Paquito Pastor and José Lugo expanded the piano's solo vocabulary with jazz gestures, tone clusters, quarter constructs and even atonal elements, *montuneo* remained largely rooted in traditional Cuban models.

By the 1980s, Cuba's intensely self-referential *costumbrismo* of slang expressions, spiritual practices, important places and topographical beauty did not speak very loudly to Puerto Rican, Nuyorican and other Latin American salseros.²⁹ In order to survive,

²⁹ Henry Fiol interviews, 28 February 2013.

salsa had to transform itself beyond a Cuban-derivative music that had contributed everything from instruments and performance practices to a bulwark of repertoire. *Salsa* was being disseminated and played in nearly every Latin American metropolis. Although *salsa* was marketed as the voice of the Latino meta-barrio, no specific musical elements would have suggested its pan-Latino scope. *Salsa* initially respected the integrity of Cuban genres such as *son*, *guaracha*, *chachachá*, and *bolero*, but developed its own conventions by the late 1970s.

Despite Cuba's political and economic isolation, many of my Cuban pianist “informants” recall lots of *salsa* recordings were played on Cuban radio. Cuban composer/bandleaders such as Juan Formell and Jesús "Chucho" Valdés deliberately made crucial structural and instrumental decisions intent on distinguishing their sounds from *salsa*. Some of these distinguishing characteristics involved instrumentation (e.g., Los Van Van’s use of drum set rather than *bongó* and *timbales*, or Irakere’s use of the Fender Rhodes and Moog synthesizer). But other distinguishing features between Cuban music and *salsa* during the 1970s involved changes to traditional stock patterns and musical roles. Rather than the octave-based piano *montuno* of yesteryear, César Pedroso and Chucho Valdés borrowed idiomatic features from jazz, psychedelic rock, and soul keyboard playing: chordal motifs, blue notes, and extended chromatic harmonies.

By the 1990s, two mature generations of Cuban Conservatory-trained pianists had expanded the piano's gestural/textural vocabulary, developing a focus on, and fascination with, the intensity of musical changes. The availability and proliferation of fully

weighted, 88-key, sample-based keyboards with bright piano patches may have facilitated this gestural/textural vocabulary expansion. Many Cuban bands, including Juan Formell's Los Van Van, Elio Revé's Charangón and José Luis Cortés' NG La Banda, added a *teclado* (second keyboard synthesizer) to cover extended harmonies and support emerging *timba* pianists' gestural/texturally varied *tumbaos* with counterfigures, electronic percussion effects, horn doublings, and sustained chordal "pads." Meanwhile, in the U.S. and Latin America, *salsa* has remained plagued by enduring conservatism despite early experimentation.³⁰ Especially in the United States, *salsa* partially maintains tradition as cultural identity by resisting musical assimilation. Growing up and eventually taking my place in the *salsa* community, I was always acutely aware that our music was a subculture in America under constant threat of extinction. The vast majority of Latinos born between the 1960s and 1980s gravitated toward pop, rock and hip hop, often spoke little Spanish or Spanglish and generally disdained their parents' and grandparents' musics. Within this climate of assimilation pressure from within and without, every Spanish word, every home-cooked dish, and every musical marker intensified our sense of Hispanic identity. *Salsa*, once considered the cutting edge of pan-Latino musical aesthetics, has always maintained a traditionalist outlook. Pressures from record labels to perpetuate commercially successful formulae have brought about the *salsa romántica* beginning in the 1980s and today's highly commercial *salsa*, pioneered in the 1990s by arranger/producer Sergio George.

³⁰ Juan Flores, *Salsa Rising: Latin Music of the 60s Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 42-43, 101-103.

Different recording practices in and outside Cuba may also contribute to *salsa*'s excessive reliance on formulaic realizations of piano *tumbaos*. My Cuban colleagues always point out that Cuban musicians, as state employees drawing a titular salary, often rehearse daily and debut material live long before recording it. This practice of frequent rehearsal and live recording is also part of *salsa*'s golden age lore. However, whereas Cuban bands largely adhere to these practices, most contemporary *salsa* albums are tracked by session players, relying on overdubs and eschewing preproduction rehearsals.

This studio practice took hold during the 1980s preponderance of *salsa romántica*, in which erotic lyrics and adaptations of pan-Latino *baladas* prevailed. Although *salsa romántica*'s stylistic conventions have inexplicably endured until today, with no signs of abatement, they are frequently derided by musicians of different generations. Yet, the *salsa romántica* treatment of *baladas* has in large part become the prototype for Cuban *timba cuerpos* (opening strophes or verses). *Timba* piano's gestural/textural variety and systematic variation techniques have made inroads in contemporary commercial *salsa*.

Arsenio Rodríguez and Juan Formell: Two Towering Figures in Cuban Popular Music

It can be argued that Cuban popular music would have never been the same without Arsenio Rodríguez or Juan Formell, though for different reasons and during different historical moments. Both are known today primarily as composers/arrangers and bandleaders rather than mere virtuoso performers. Both

nearly singlehandedly developed new genre complexes from a combination of Cuba's rich musical traditions and their imaginations. Both expanded the prototypical instrumentations and roles within their ensembles. Both retooled textuality in songwriting, becoming renowned and respected social chroniclers. Both blended rurality with urbanity, reinterpreting *topoi* from regional genres in cosmopolitan contexts. But most importantly, Arsenio Rodríguez and Juan Formell confronted the differing aesthetic demands of the outside world, in terms of North American popular musics, indigenous Latin American genres, and their adaptations of Cuban music.

Arsenio Rodríguez

Arsenio Rodríguez (1911-1970) is responsible for nearly every sonic dimension of the Cuban *conjunto* ensemble as well as the *salsa orquestas* derived from it. Born in the rural Matanzas town of Güira de Macuríes, Arsenio's family still spoke Kicongo and participated in Palo Mayombe rituals, whose melodies and rhythms inspired the 1930s *lamentos afrocubanos* that spearheaded Arsenio's songwriting career. Upon forming his own *conjunto* in 1940, Arsenio began infusing his music with overt Afro-Cuban elements including Kicongo and *Lukumí* vocabulary, call-and-response sections based on ceremonial songs and interlocking ostinati taken from folkloric genres such as *yuka*, *palo*, and *makuta*. Collaborating with pianist/arranger Luis "Lili" Martínez Griñan from 1946 to 1952, Arsenio was

able to augment his profound folkloric knowledge with explorations of chromatic jazz harmony, making use of whole-tone scales, secondary dominant chains, and blues elements. Born in Guantánamo and intimately familiar with rural regional genres such as *changüí*, *quiribá*, *regina*, and *nengón*, Lili helped Arsenio to incorporate rural eastern Cuban syncopations, melodic figures and song forms into his *guaguancó de salón* and *son-montuno*. Arsenio Rodríguez's "Africanizations" of Cuban popular song forms partially rest upon the heady connections between *changüí*'s syncopated melodies and the applications of *rumba* song forms to the *guaguancó de salon* saluting Havana's mostly black Cuban working-class neighborhoods.

In terms of instrumentation and ensemble roles, Arsenio's *conjunto* was one of the first to integrate the conga drum with the *bongó* into a folkloric-inspired conversational matrix, an indubitable nod toward Afro-Cuban folkloric rhythmic aesthetics. Arsenio's *bajo cantado*, (singing bass), expanded the bass's function from the *marímbula*'s percussive harmonic-dominant-tonic patterns to full diatonic-chromatic melodic participation. During the 1960s in New York, the singing bass became a cornerstone of *boogaloo*, concretely connecting Cuban and African-American soul musics.³¹ Arsenio also developed a characteristic interlocking treatment of trumpet *mambos* combined with dramatic percussion breaks, which he called *diablo*. Expanded by arrangers such as Israel "Cachao" López, Bebo Valdés and

³¹ Ibid., 79-114.

Dámiso Pérez Prado, Arsenio's *diablo* directly inspired the *mambo* craze, popularized during the 1940s and 1950s by the New York orchestras of Machito and Tito Puente.³²

Moving permanently to New York with his family in 1952, Arsenio realized that his *conjunto macho y negro* style would have to undergo major modifications in order to appeal to New York's Puerto Rican and African-American demographics accustomed to faster tempi, simpler bass lines, and readily accessible lyrics. Albums such as 1958's *Primitivo*, responded to this tension by harkening back to rural roots, while 1961's *Fiesta En Harlem* and 1963's *La Pachanga* were riddled with possibly hasty concessions to New York's musical demands. But by 1963, Arsenio had crafted a musical mixture of jazz, soul, *son-montuno* and Cuban folkloric ceremonial song that prefigured *boogaloo*, which he called *Quindembo*.

While Arsenio's now-classic songs have become Cuban *música tradicional* standards and typify *música típica* outside of Cuba, today's international *salsa* and *timba*'s decidedly modern sonic and textual features remain inextricably tied to his initially forward-looking legacy. Arsenio's harmonization strategies for pentatonic folkloric melodies are incorporated into contemporary quotations of ceremonial songs and *rumba* refrains. Arsenio's singing bass has proven to be the prototype for *timba*'s punchy and thumping bass. Arsenio's conversational *conga/bongó* matrix

³² David Garcia, *Arsenio Rodríguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006): 45-50.

has inspired similar percussion matrixes between *congas*, *timbales* and drum kit used in both contemporary international commercial *salsa* and Cuban *timba*. Arsenio's three-trumpet *diablo* technique, applied to mixed horn sections, constitutes the layered *mambo* or *champola* used in *salsa* and *timba*.

Juan Formell

From his beginnings in 1968 as bassist and arranger for Elio Revé's *charanga*, Juan Formell has incorporated seemingly incongruous influences into his complex of *songo* genres: *rumba* rather than *son clave*, simplified singing bass lines, melodically innovative *conga marchas*, atypical piano *tumbaos* and harmonic progressions influenced by psychedelic rock and also found in late nineteenth-century German "Romanticism." Formell's group, Los Van Van, formed in 1970, endures as an institution precisely because of Formell's intuitive grasp of social stylistic currents and his balancing of tradition and innovation. Los Van Van's very instrumentation belies this balance, juxtaposing symbols of *Cubanismo* and Cuban cosmopolitanism. For its first decade, the group was a modified *charanga*; electric bass, and an assortment of keyboards replaced the traditional acoustic bass and piano. The violin and cello sections were augmented by electric guitar, while drum kit replaced the traditional *timbales*. *Congas*, *güiro*, lead flute, and unison vocals anchored Los Van Van as a recognizable *charanga*. In a 1993 interview filmed at Havana's Escuela Nacional de Arte, Juan Formell asserts that his instrumentation

decisions were reactions to the prototypical sonic structure and roles found in Cuban *charangas* and *orquestas*. By avoiding *mambo*'s typical interlocking cowbell patterns, piano *tumbao* gestures and harmonically ubiquitous fifth-based root progressions, Los Van Van immediately accrued a distinctive sound that marked the group as being Cuban and Revolutionary. Formell's *songo* complex of multi-tempo genres introduced a host of distinct *conga* and drum kit patterns, many taken from folkloric *Lukumí batá* rhythms and carnival *comparsa*. Formell also innovated and standardized the practice of two or more harmonically contrasted *montunos* within the same song.

By 1980, Cuba had begun reevaluating its musical past in order to combat international *salsa*'s encroachment and market domination. Influenced by the hard-edged trombone timbres of New York groups such as Eddie Palmieri's La Perfecta and Món Rivera, Formell incorporated two and then three trombones into Los Van Van. Van Van's drummer/percussionist José Luis "Changuito" Quintana, innovator of dozens of *songo* patterns, switched to a more conventional *timbal* setup, flanked by kick drum and electronic synth pads. On albums such as 1984's *Anda Ven y Muévete* or 1990's *Aquí El Que Baila Gana*, Changuito overdubbed *bongó*, strengthening Van Van's sonic connections to Cuban traditional music and international *salsa*. Changuito also perfected a double-cowbell technique copied by scores of *timba* drummers. Van Van's pianist/composer César "Pupy" Pedrosó, long a traditionalist compared to Formell, began using fewer electric keyboards during the 1980s,

creating a *tumbao* gestural language centered around decorative diminished dominant implications contrary motion arpeggios.

Beginning on 1997's *Te Pone La Cabeza Mala*, Formell switched from fretted electric bass to the fretless baby bass preferred in international *salsa*. By that point, Changuito had left the group and Formell's son Samuel had abandoned the electronic pads' dated 1980s associations. Pupy Pedroso left the group in 2001 to form *Los Que Son Son*, but pianist Roberto Carlos "Cucurucho" Valdés has furthered Pedroso's piano *tumbao* gestural language as part of *Van Van's sello* or signature sound. Bassist Pavel Molina similarly perpetuates Formell's baby bass *sello*. As Cuba's top popular music institution, *Los Van Van* has the luxury of an immense discographic back catalog familiar to at least three generations of Cuban musicians and audiences.

In an unpublished private recording of a 1993 interview at Havana's conservatory, the *Escuela Nacional De Arte*, *Los Van Van's* leader, composer and bassist Juan Formell elucidates how *songo* arose both as a reaction to and incorporation of Western pop elements, as well as a continuation of Cuban popular music's historical trajectory:

In the first place, I don't consider *songo* to be a new rhythm in and of itself. During the time when the idea of *Los Van Van* took flight, there were fundamentally the antecedents of *Orquesta Aragón* and *Benny Moré*, as well as a series of inventions, new rhythms such as the Mozambique, *pacá* and *pilón*, rhythms that essentially stayed put right where they were created. Because of that, we think that Cuban music has certain fundamental elements upon which everything must be based, and we fundamentally based ourselves on *son*.³³

³³ Juan Formell, interview, n.d. Author's translation from Spanish.

Formell's comments reveal a number of seeming contradictions that cut to the core of Cubans' views on revolution, tradition, and innovation. Los Van Van's first five albums owe more to the Beatles and Sly Stone than traditional *son* in terms of melody, harmony, tempo variety, and rhythm. Their early work symbolized youthful rebellion and predilection for Western culture atop an indigenous foundation. Their state-sponsored exposure and popular appeal rested on claims to novelty and tradition, which dovetailed with utopian socialist visions of a new, racially egalitarian Cuba. In the early 1980s, when groups like Rumbavana and Son 14 revitalized older Cuban forms, partially as the Revolution's answer to U.S. and Puerto Rican *salsa*, Van Van's music began incorporating more overt elements from *son* and *guaracha*. Today, Los Van Van is considered by many Cubans to be *timba*; its music incorporates *timba*'s stylizations of hip hop and funk, as well as folkloric elements and bass/percussion gears. Thus, Formell's comments may display a revisionist slant, adapting to changing times, politics, economics, and aesthetics.

The careers and *oeuvres* of Arsenio Rodríguez and Juan Formell point to a number of themes: selective musical mixture, instrumentation, genre, style, ensemble roles, and audience reception. Although the only timbral novelties in Arsenio's *conjunto* were the amplified *tres* introduced in the 1950s, limited use of *timbales* and tenor saxophone in the 1960s, Arsenio's music always represented a distinctly Cuban sound, even when divorced from Cuba's soil. In order for Arsenio's

aural innovations to be incorporated into international *salsa*'s stylistic developments, they first had to be regularized and standardized, thus altering their initial impetus. Because of *salsa*'s generally faster tempi, Arsenio's folkloric-inspired conversational *conga/bongó* matrix gave way to a standardized *conga tumbao* or *mazacote* against which the *bongó* marked its *martillo* with a preset variation vocabulary. Arsenio's singing bass, generally deemed too syncopated for *mambo* or *salsa* dancing, is now only used today at slow tempi for deliberate *son-montuno* evocation. Arsenio's interlocking *diablo* technique persists in countless *salsa* and *timba champolas*. Especially in Cuban *charangas* such as Orquesta Aragón and Ritmo Oriental, the dramatic *cierres* or breaks first used as preludes to Arsenio's *diablos* now serve as collective rhythm section variants, gear changes, and sectional shifts.

In terms of song forms and textuality, Arsenio Rodríguez's and Juan Formell's legacies inside and outside Cuba remain mixed. For David García, Arsenio's focus away from introductory *cantos* and towards call-and-response *estribillos* represents Africanization.³⁴ Arsenio's *son-montunos*, often built around catchy *Coros* brimming with slang expressions and social satire, became templates for New York 1950s *mambos* centered around simple refrains. In Juan Formell's massive *oeuvre*, Afro-Cuban elements and argot not only continue Arsenio's legacy but more importantly function as an indispensable expressive outlet in socialist Cuba. In Los Van Van's recent work, Formell clearly incorporates *timba*'s use of rapped *coros*, references to

³⁴ García, *Rodríguez*, 12-63.

Afro-Cuban ceremonial repertoires, and hard-edged, slang-encoded depictions of Cuba's harsh social realities.³⁵

In contrast, during the nearly three-decade international preeminence of *salsa romántica* and commercial *salsa* the main textual topic has been love. Gone are the myriad textual evocations of *Latino barrio* life in U.S. inner cities and Latin American slums, once thought to be cornerstones of *salsa*'s distinct identity. *Estribillos* or *montuno* sections contain so little improvised vocal material that they often seem like veritable afterthoughts to the song's *balada*-based *cuerpos* or bodies. Moreover, *salsa romántica*'s subconscious downplaying of overtly Afro-Cuban elements belies its ambivalence towards the Afro-Diasporic cultural and political components of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and U.S. Hispanic communities. For *salsa romántica* arrangers, musicians and record producers, too much syncopation, *clave* play, and use of Cuban or Puerto Rican slang risks the alienation of the international Latin American audiences that turn to contemporary *salsa* as one of a host of expressively relevant genres including pan-Latin pop, *rock en español*, *merengue*, *bachata*, and *reggaeton*. *Salsa dura*, discussed below, has addressed *salsa romántica*'s sociocultural "abandonment" of *salsa*'s Nuyorican roots in both textually and musically quantifiable terms. Rather than turn to the obvious solution of *salsa dura* aesthetics, *salsa romántica* has ironically responded to criticisms of

³⁵ R. L. Cano, "Timba and Its Meanings: The Semiotic Scaffolding of One Aggressive Cuban Music Genre" IASPM Conference (Rome, Italy: July 25-30, 2005).

excessively silky smooth polish by incorporating *timba* gears such as bass dropouts and percussion bloques. Meanwhile, *timba* evokes romantic tropes during *cuerpos* by adopting *salsa romántica*-style arrangement and performance practices.

The constituent elements adapted, adopted, or rejected by Cuban music's transnational diaspora convey deeply meaningful cultural meanings. Combinations of compositional and performative aesthetics deliberately invoke and evoke specific historical, racial, ethnic, and spatial realities. In the following chapter outline, I begin to answer larger questions regarding links between sound, style, ethnic identity, history, cultural power politics, and aesthetic values.

Migration and Musical Mobility

Despite the parallel but largely isolated historical trajectories of Cuba and its musical diaspora outlined above, Cuban and Latin American musicians have always interacted as much as geopolitics would permit. Before Castro's revolution, Cuban musicians freely emigrated or worked in different countries for long periods. Emigration brought Arsenio Rodríguez, José Fajardo, Machito, Mario Bauzá, Pérez Prado, Mongo Santamaría, Carlos "Patato" Valdés and dozens of others to the United States, both as bandleaders and sidemen. During the Revolution's first decade, musician emigration slowed to a trickle while other types of emigration flourished. This may have been due to the Revolution's establishment of free conservatory education in Cuba's major cities, as well as amateur instructions in neighborhood schools. Cuban musicians who left the

island during the 1980 Mariel boatlift, including Daniel Ponce, Orlando “Puntilla” Roís and Paquito d’Rivera, often encountered a musical community that viewed them as competitors rather than a tradition’s sacred guardians.

These tensions likewise plagued more recent arrivals in New York from Cuba, including Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Carlos Caro, Arturo Sandoval, Carlos Manuel, Manolín González “El médico de la salsa” and Issac Delgado. Of these, Manolín González and Issac Delgado have prominently repatriated back to Cuba. Although many American, Latin American European, and Japanese musicians often stay in Cuba for extended periods, mostly studying with master musicians and pedagogues, there are precious few known cases of permanent residency. Given the historical impracticality of musician migration between Cuba and its musical diaspora, the 1990s saw a brain drain of Cuba’s musicians that continues today.

Most of my Cuban informants for this work have lived elsewhere for at least a decade. These include percussionist Tomás Cruz, vocalists Pepito Gomez. Yenisel Valdés, Michel Maza, and thousands more, hundreds of whom are my Facebook friends. Most of these musician *émigrés* cite economic and musical opportunities, rather than political freedom, as their main reason for leaving Cuba. Emigration notwithstanding, there is a different kind of virtual travel that transcends and circumvents human migration patterns. Radio, television, recordings, and the internet have facilitated the kind of musical travel that only migration could previously provide. This has meant that non-

Cuban musicians have historically achieved mastery mainly through exposure to and emulation of recordings. Many non-Cuban musicians have felt an imperative for self-validation through Cuban musician approval, whereas many others have displayed little interest in connecting with actual Cuban people and culture. Necessity and my internal proclivities have obliged me to achieve some measure of musical mastery through a combination of fierce recording collection and analysis, piano teaching, live and recorded performances with Cuban musicians, and the series of extended interviews with Cuban and Latin musicians that inform this work.

This historical overview of Cuban and Latin piano musical developments underscores the importance of both tradition and innovation, both in terms of musical style itself and cultural significance. The following section is a more personal and hopefully intimate reflection on how scholars such as myself, precariously balanced between performing mastery and “book smarts,” have dealt with this heavy history and attempt to “romance” authenticity.

Romancing Authenticity in Cuban/Latin Music

From the dawn of recorded music, modern travel, and the global interconnectivity of the internet and social media, it has become increasingly common for aspiring musicians to fall in love with foreign cultures and their artforms. This love is initially idealistic, full of hopes of mastering "authenticity," gaining acceptance from the other culture, reinventing oneself, or realizing a purpose in life. This endeavor is, however, not

free of pitfalls, and too many wide-eyed idealists embark on this romantic/artistic quest without the proper protection, preventative, or remedial knowledge to avoid failure and disappointment. By first setting forth a generalized trajectory outlining the insider/outsider dynamic, I pose crucial questions, draw upon my musical formation and offer some solutions to rehumanize this dynamic, even in today's burgeoning global musical ecosystem.

For these purposes, it is important to distinguish between "native" and "foreign" musics. "Native" musics are typically found in one's mainstream culture, while "foreign" musics exist within a geographically, racially, ethnically, or ideologically distinct space. Both native and foreign musical forms may be vocal and/or instrumental, social or sacred, noncommercial (traditional folk), commercial (popular), and rarified art musics. In most cultures, these art forms are formally or informally transmitted, through processes including one-on-one instruction, ensemble participation, public, private, or conservatory education. Whether formal or informal, these transmission methods usually revolve around a corpus of musical vocabulary, repertoire, genre characteristics, aesthetic principles, and sociocultural circumstances. For musics to gain traction and survive changing times, their generative cultures must achieve consensus regarding what is and is not permitted in the music. Since these boundaries are usually porous, what was once derided can eventually become common practice.

Theory

Romancing a foreign music usually begins with an "attraction narrative". One may gain exposure to a distant music through friends, mass media, travel, internet searches, etc. The foreign music usually appeals to a seeker of similarities or contrasts to what is already known. The initial attraction to foreign music usually leads to casual, then obsessive consumption, wherein the aspirant attempts, within record time, to become familiar with the music's sociocultural context, history, aesthetic principles, venerable and controversial figures, stylistic vicissitudes, etc. This is most efficiently accomplished via recording collection, performance attendance, and gradual cultural entry. If the music exists in a local diaspora, the aspirant may attempt social connections with its practitioners and musical exchanges with its musicians. If the aspirant has access to instruments, performing venues, recording studios, instruments, sound equipment, and such, favors may be exchanged for knowledge in mutually beneficial transactions. If no local diasporic music scene exists, the aspirant may feel sufficiently inspired to travel to the music's indigenous homeland, scaling cultural, economic, and linguistic barriers.

If political/diplomatic ties between native and foreign countries are strained or hostile, pursuit of the foreign music may gain passionate ardor. The aspirant may temporarily conflate musical infatuation with fanatical political support or advocacy. Depending on its extremity, this may augment or diminish the aspirant's credibility to the foreign culture, and will likely brand the aspirant as a smitten lunatic within their own

culture. If the aspirant had experienced ostracism, loneliness, isolation, or a sense of opposition to their native cultural values, acceptance into the foreign culture will usually feel like a release, resolution of life-long tensions or a return home. Yet, the aspirant will eventually learn that they are not home at all; rather, they have entered a treacherous world full of land mines, hypocrisy, disillusionment, and betrayal. Success in the seductive endeavor therefore depends on survival in an unfamiliar environment whose seemingly shifting rules, mores, and values require an agile, cunning mind to chase and hunt.

Once the aspirant gains enough of a foothold in the foreign culture, aesthetic divisions and stylistic fault lines become apparent. Neutrality is initially attempted by befriending rival sources and synthesizing gathered information. However, in order for profound secrets to be revealed, the student must eventually choose a side; this is the point at which true apprenticeship begins. A private teacher is located, fees are negotiated and instruction (of varying quality) is undertaken. At first, the master practitioner chosen as teacher and the disciple share similar hopes of a fruitful relationship. While the disciple hopes to achieve proficiency in their beloved musical pursuit, the instructor may seek to augment prestige, travel abroad, penetrate foreign markets, and perhaps prevail against long-standing rivals.

Instruction usually consists of regular lessons where the repertoire is laid out and aesthetic performing techniques are disseminated through imitative repetition. At this

point, the disciple may have underlying questions about the musical system's organization, which may be answered through a combination of anecdotes and vague platitudes (at worst) and at least rudimentary theoretical principles (at best). Whether through exhaustive practice or the "short cut" of theoretical understanding, the disciple's ultimate goal is indistinguishable musical ability with the natives. At this stage, issues of accent, pronunciation, rhythmic feel, ensemble cooperation, and transition between various performative modes are usually outlined. The disciple will usually be randomly tested by being thrown into normative performing situations to gauge quick thinking, steadiness, endurance, and other necessary skills.

If instruction goes smoothly, everyone gets at least some of what they want. However, if the student's progress is anything less than astonishing, both sides may grow suspicious. The disciple may question whether the best mentor was chosen, while the master practitioner may wonder whether taking on this foreign student was a good idea after all. Even in a worst case scenario, where the wrong master practitioner was chosen or has been outgrown, the disciple's quest for acceptance and approval can continue along its original track. A new instructor may be located, with an acceptable hand-off. Cordial friendships between former and current instructors may be attempted. As the former and current instructors jockey for ultimate prestige resulting from this situation, the disciple may be shown off or manipulated as a pawn in a petty drama in which right and wrong are almost impossible to discern.

Assuming that the disciple survives a messy mixture of random, disconnected instruction, seeming contradictions, corrections, re-corrections, and obviously interpersonal friction, the true seduction stage is set. Up to this point, the disciple developed from a naively curious enthusiast, to a dedicated student and perhaps competent practitioner. But all along, the lines were clearly drawn, with the disciple as seeker and the foreign culture as sought. As long as all terms were mutually agreeable, everyone theoretically stood to gain from this set of exchanges. The disciple may have sought to parlay newfound knowledge into academic scholarship, or simply return home to infuse humdrum jams with the real deal. The instructor clique meanwhile got its music on more of the map, made money from lesson tuitions, perhaps got more or better gigs or gained entry into previously closed environments. All the while, the disciple may never have thought themselves capable of true mastery, therefore posing no economic threat to the host culture. The host culture may have always conceived of the interloper as a benevolent amateur (at worst) or a colleague conduit into the global music marketplace (at best).

But what if things derail, the disciple learning too quickly, mastering too much and eventually throwing himself into the same hat as the instructors? The host culture's flattery from being chosen for this exploration may turn to guarded self-protection or defensiveness. Information may be obfuscated rather than freely dispensed. Ethnic, racial, or cultural grounds may be used to justify discrimination against the very same disciple who seemed poised for certain certification. Performing opportunities, once plentiful,

may become mysteriously scarce. If travel between the native and foreign countries reverses, the once stellar disciple may be sidelined, avoided, or even shunned. At this point, the aspiring "insider" may question whether insider status was ever achieved at all, or whether it even matters in the long run. The toil, time, and effort so lovingly dedicated to mastery of this alluring foreign music may seem ultimately futile.

Practice

Growing up in New York's vibrant pan-Latino musical culture, I was taken under the wings of my father, whose music career was well-established, and musicians who moved in his circle. In that musical environment, there were two types of Cuban popular dance music: traditional and contemporary. Traditional Cuban music was largely created and disseminated before the 1959 Revolution, primarily by deceased or exiled Cuban musicians: instrumentalist/bandleaders Arsenio Rodríguez, Pérez Prado, Mario Bauzá and José Fajardo, percussionists Chano Pozo, Carlos "Papato" Valdés, Orestes Vilató, and vocalists Celia Cruz, La Lupe, Machito, Rolando la Serie, and such. Since this music became the cornerstone of New York-style *mambo*, *pachanga*, and later *salsa*, traditional Cuban music was, at once, familiar and comforting.

Contemporary Cuban music, on the other hand, came to us in dribs and drabs, through endlessly recopied cassettes, smuggled vinyl, and the rare VHS video. Los Van Van's *songo* spread through Cuba's post-Revolutionary scene like a wildfire of change.

Songwriter, bandleader, bassist, and arranger Juan Formell's harmonies were reminiscent of psychedelic rock, the Beatles, and Beach Boys. Percussionist extraordinaire José Luis "Changuito" Quintana's drumset creations were funky like James Brown or Blood, Sweat and Tears, but deeply rooted in *clave*. *Songo* permeated *charangas* such as Ritmo Oriental and Típica Juventud, as well as jazz-oriented bands such as Irakere. Some of us, especially my father's generation, could not get behind its aesthetic changes: electric basses and guitars, keyboard synthesizers, Farfisa organ, Fender Rhodes, drum pads, and breath-controlled MIDI wind instruments.

By the early 1980s, Cuban musicians had become well aware that throughout U.S. Hispanic-Caribbean communities and most of Latin America, their traditional genres had converged and metamorphosized into an amorphously defined marketing term, *salsa*, championed by now classic artists: pianist Larry Harlow, *conguero* Ray Barretto, trombonist/songwriter Willie Colón, and bassist/arranger Bobby Valentín. *Salsa* gave exiled Cuban singers Celia Cruz, La Lupe, and Justo Betancourt. Traditionalists such as the Fania record label's co-founder Johnny Pacheco, drew endlessly from the historical Cuban well, covering hundreds of songs and simplifying their original arrangements.

Cuban musicians often cite a legendary concert by Venezuelan vocalist/bassist Oscar de León as the foreign prophet on a pilgrimage to his musical inspiration, land, culture, and people, who reawakened interest in traditional Cuban popular genres. Under this umbrella, traditionalist bands such as Son 14 and Original de Manzanillo were joined

in the revival by "legacy" groups such as Orquesta Aragón, Charanga Sensación, and Conjunto rumbavana.

The *salsa* world could relate much better to Cuba's 1980s traditionalist strain than it had to the 1970s experimental period, even if most groups could not afford baby bassists and all recorded with Egrem's infamous Yamaha Sampling Grand electric piano. But by early the early 1990s, during the Special Period following the Soviet collapse, a new *intergénero* (synthesized genre) *timba* would take everything the Latin world assumed to be true about Cuban music and turn it upside down. *Coros* would be rapped rather than intoned with near operatic vibrato or perfect unison, as in previous decades. Rather than chug along the traditional anticipated bass and stock *guaracha*-derived piano *tumbaos*, *timba* bass lines were lower in register, rhythmically unpredictable and clearly derived from American funk. *Timbaleros* and drumset players now had classical percussion degrees in tympani and xylophone, plus rigorous study of sticking techniques and rudiments. Piano *tumbaos* cascaded in garlands of variations, flirting with *clave* and cross-rhythms, lengthening and shortening harmonic cycles and saturating the rhythm section with new pianistic gestures and textures.

The United States, Europe, and Latin America had assimilated two waves of post-Revolutionary Cuban emigrations: one during Fidel Castro's first decade in power, the other on the 1980 Mariel Boatlifts. Many of the musicians aboard el Mariel were folkloric masters: *batá* drummers Roberto Borrell, Alfredo "Coyute" Bideaux and

Orlando "Puntilla" Ríos. Aspiring percussionist studied with them, learning the *oru secos* and ocha songs of the *Lukumí* religion with every possible archiving tool at the time: handwritten notes and scores, audio recordings and film. I was part of that aspiring percussionist group. We studied for years with our Cuban gurus, trusting their disgression in giving us performing opportunities. We often got the low-paying gigs they didn't want, or the museum, theater and concert spectaculars where our bilingual abilities were prized. But the Mariel wave did not include entire bands or even entire rhythm sections. Jazz soloists Arturo Sandoval, Paquito de Rivera, and Gonzalo Rubalcaba settled among us, eventually fulfilling their dreams to swing with our jazz cats. But they had little interest in popular music.

When the early 1990s Special Period plunged Cuba into unparalleled desperation and overwhelming poverty, a third wave of *emigrés*, the *balceros*, scattered to the world's far corners, from the U.S. and Canada to every European country, South America, China, Japan, India, and Saudi Arabia. Musicians came alone and in groups of colleagues, with and without their families. But by the early 2000s, so many had settled down that the non-Cuban Latin music scene could finally experience *timba* with all-Cuban bands, whose musicians taught eager players in these farflung nations to funk up the bass and drums, invent melodic multiple-conga *marchas* and construct dazzling piano *tumbaos*. Finally, we could pick their brains and ask them how their modern music worked, how people knew when to play or lay out, when to ramp it up or tone it down, how to get crowds dancing without understanding Spanish. Unlike the 78s and 45s of pre-

Revolutionary recordings that formed us, we no longer had to speculate about how songs would sound live, unhindered by recording time constraints. We could hear bands take audiences through waves of grooves and gears, choreographed, precisely planned and rehearsed.

The jolt of new Cuban energy couldn't have hit the *salsa* world soon enough. From the 1980s until the early 2000s, classic *salsa*'s blistering intensity, creativity and experimentation had given way to "*salsa romántica*" or "*salsa erótica*," favoring singer/soloists such as Eddie Santiago, Jerry Rivera, and Tito Rojas. Based on pan-Latino *baladas* rather than *salsa*'s song tropes, *salsa romántica* used stock arrangements and performance practices. There were no song-specific piano *tumbaos* or bass lines, no layered horn *moñas* and half-*Coros*. These songs were easy to record and replicate live. A cadre of session players including percussionist Roberto Quintero, bassist Rubén Rodríguez, and pianist/arranger/producer Sergio George, ensured consistent quality product. Although Cuban *timba* was always consistent and high quality, it was never predictable; there were always spaces for ensemble and individual virtuosity.

Many of us, raised on Cuban tradition and fortified by encounters with contemporary Cuba, now found our skill sets under-utilized. Like so many Cuban music admirers and practitioners, I romanced authenticity, trying my best at every juncture to capture that mysterious Cuban flavor. But ninety miles of ocean and a world of political mistrust separated me from my "beloved." Moving to Cuba and playing in top-tier *timba*

bands was pragmatically unrealistic, and perhaps unfair for Cuba's continuing conveyor of conservatory graduates needing to earn a living.

Reflections on My Relationship to Cuban Music

In this brave new world of Latin Grammys, Youtube Videos, and social media, it is hard to reconnect with *Cuba Linda* (beautiful Cuba): *reggaetón* is driving everyone mad with its immutable beat and streetwise lyrics. Ironically, I now share feelings of alienation and disappointment with my Cuban brothers and sisters. Even after romancing authenticity, the prize remains as elusive to me as it is to them. After years on this idealized quest for mutual musical understanding, unsettling questions remain.

Is it intrinsically exploitive for a musician from a privileged culture to take all he can from a less-privileged one, whether for scholarly research, artistic enrichment, or financial gain? As the preceding historical overview of Cuban and Latin piano's overarching themes demonstrates, it would be unfair to characterize the United States and Latin America as "privileged" musical environments. Even in terms of economic prosperity, living standards, access to viable recording, and radio and live performance promotion, Cuban musicians are in many ways more privileged than musicians in the Latin music world. Notwithstanding, Cuban musicians have readily abandoned a musical culture focused around a national conservatory system and a tightly controlled *empresas* (government organizations in charge of procuring touring and recording engagements).

They have reluctantly left families behind, not knowing when they would make enough money *al exterior* to send home or fund return visits. They defect while on tour, hiding in hotel rooms or strangers' houses until the rest of their entourage leaves without them. Upon reaching foreign shores, Cuban expatriate musicians tend to feel initially elated by opportunities to master non-Cuban musical styles and work without government censorship. But they also become frustrated with the Latin music world's perpetual hustle. Since Latin musicians do not live under a socialist system that nominally pays them to attend daily rehearsals with a single band, as though it were a full time job, the Latin musical world is plagued by impromptu arrangements, pickup bands, and overdubbed recordings. These circumstances, along with commercial pressures, have taken their toll on pan-Latin *salsa* over the past thirty years.

Is the dream of eventual enmeshment with a foreign culture misguided or realistically achievable? In my experience and that of many non-Cuban musicians attempting to render the Cuban sound authentically, our years of dedication have indeed left many of us with a glowing feeling of musical satisfaction and a modicum of social acceptance by Cuban musicians on and off the island. Furthermore, this dissertation and that of other Cuban music scholars have provided vital conceptual bridges facilitating the non-Cuban world's greater appreciation for and understanding of the musical aesthetics and parameters governing musical mixture and genre consciousness.

Can an "outsider" pass a blindfold authenticity test? Yes! Most Cuban and Latin

musicians today have had shockingly revelatory experiences upon realizing the extent to which Cuban musical aesthetics have been assimilated outside of Cuba. Many Latin musicians such as myself have had our minds blown by new generations of Cuban musicians propelling popular and folkloric musics forward in terms of systematic variation and alternatives to literal repetition.

As numerous cultures interact and collide, power dynamics are not always in favor of the white Westerner, the privileged academic, the conservatory-educated Cuban or the hot young Latin player fresh out of Julliard. Since cultural and musical “insiders” and “outsiders” have been dancing around each other for decades, we cannot tell hunter from prey or seducer from seduced. When cultural outsiders manage to craft careers out of their enthusiasm and discipline, there are no clear winners or losers. With these reversals, the insiders and outsiders, privileged and deprived, powerful and powerless roles are inverted. Now competing in a global anarchy of infinite musical choices, rigid boundaries and pseudo-utopian boundlessness clashing, how can the fractured hopes of mutual intelligibility be rebuilt? Here are some provisional answers:

Ownership and authenticity can be fluid rather than static. The colonial legacies of privilege and exploitation may not reflect current global realities. The seemingly automatic causal connection between insider status and inherent musical authenticity is not always accurate or compassionate towards everyone involved. Emic insider terminology and pedagogical practices are not always superior to etic outsider

perspectives or methodologies. We all can earn the right to master, explain, or even judiciously alter each other's musics, as long as respect for roots and traditions are always consciously respected. The insider mystique can be substituted by an informed, merit-based evaluation of competence, while the assumption of perpetual outsider inferiority can be opened up toward recognition of outsider mastery. The often cut-throat winner-take-all exploitive model can transform into a mutually-informed cooperative model in which all musical authenticity is ultimately uplifted. If metaphorical musical romance is to endure, with attraction narratives and trust remaining viable, serious attention needs to be given to the small actions where mistrust, suspicion, racism, discrimination, and jealousy trump love. Most people from any cultural background instinctively recognize the presence of musical talent, dedication, creativity, ingenuity, and persistence. But upon recognizing the telltale hallmarks of musical gifts, the hard work commences. It involves all quarters coming together to craft strong, firm antidotes to homogeneity, genericism, stereotyping, coercion, exploitation, and manipulation. For this, all hearts and minds must be at least as open as our voices and instruments, manifesting music's miracles in the coming world.

Chapter 3

Hidden Rhythm:

Clave as an Analytical Bridge Between Afro-Cuban and West African Musics

One of my most vivid childhood memories involved a concert by Babatunde Olatunji at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. My father, Henry Fiol, a renowned *salsa* singer/songwriter, percussionist, and bandleader, had taken me in hopes of a bonding experience with his musically precocious son. Toward the end of the performance, Olatunji called audience members up to the stage, urging them to sing, dance, or even attempt to play his troop's drums. At such a young age, I'd heard *rumba* songs as lullabies, savored my father's Cuban record collection, constructed my own imaginary *salsa* bands out of Dixie cups, and begun playing congas and bongos at local *rumbas* or band rehearsals. I'd also begun studying Western classical piano, and North Indian *tabla*. I had probably heard various kinds of West African music while scanning the radio dial or passing through New York City's multi-ethnic neighborhoods, but knew nothing of its underlying structures. Nonetheless, there I was, standing in front of a log drum that seemed gigantic and much taller than me, with Olatunji smiling as he urged me to play something.

I do not remember what kind of drum it was or which Afro-Cuban percussion techniques I tried to graft on to it as I tried to coax halfway decent sounds from it. I also do not recall which rhythm was played or how many of Olatunji's patient and generous

musicians joined in. However, I do vividly remember that the impromptu meeting between a totally blind Dominican-Nuyorican-Italian kid and Olatunji's Nigerian, Ghanaian and African-American musicians produced a mutually intelligible musical moment in which centuries of familiar strains interwove a patchwork quilt of ancestrally-related musical languages.

Even while navigating an intimidating experience with master drummers, I felt that my Afro-Cuban background allowed me to converse with them in a musical tongue far more ancient and profound than any bits of speech we could have exchanged. That language, the hidden rhythm uniting West Africa's formed musics with those fashioned in its Diaspora, is called *clave* in Cuba. My knowledge of the *clave*'s underlying structure made it possible to intuit the best way to riff atop Olatunji's masterful rhythmic bed. In that moment of near familial recognition, when I felt us all in some kind of zone, I began to understand how intimately Afro-Diasporic music has always remained connected to the "Motherland."

Years later, as I studied Cuban *batá* and ceremonial Haitian *vodu* drumming, I began to be exposed to West African drumming: Ewe, Ashanti, Dagomba and Yoruba, among others. I would often accompany my drum teacher, John Amira, for dance classes, staying afterwards to hear "Papa" Ladjí Kamara or a Senegalese *sabar* master teach their rich disciplines to eager Western drummers and dancers. At such times, I gladly pitched in, tapping a pulse, picking up a bell, or playing a supporting drum part as needed. My Western colleagues were baffled by my ability to latch on to West African structures

without studying them in depth or puzzling over downbeat and pulse positions. It all sounded like *clave*-based music to me. Perhaps, my blindness and trained reliance on my ears predisposed me toward oral rather than visual transmission. While my sighted colleagues felt the need to see music notated in order to comprehend and reproduce it, I was fortunately able to bypass the notation stage and interact orally with musical sources.

While taking Peter Manuel's course on African music at Columbia University, I began earnestly exploring the application of the *clave* concept to West African traditional and popular musics. Since many West African genres like Highlife, Fuji, Juju, and Congolese *rhumba* were explicitly influenced by exposure to Latin-American forms, mostly through recordings and radio broadcasts, the *clave* connection, as well as other structural commonalities, always seemed elementary. However, as I perused the extant ethnomusicological literature regarding perceptions of West African rhythm, pulse and cyclicity, the emic-etic conflict became starkly clear. On one hand, Western ethnomusicologists and musicians often situate interlocking parts against a pulse containing a cyclical downbeat. On the other, most African languages do not employ emic terms for these concepts, thus leading many culturally sensitive ethnomusicologists to conclude that such concepts are alien to West African musical thought.

Nonetheless, I began hearing *clave* in all sorts of unexpected places. I heard it tapped out on the gourd of a *kora* or in Ewe *gankogui* bell patterns. I heard it in lead drum phrases, *jembe* solos and supporting parts. I heard *clave* in Yoruba proverbs on *dundun* while studying with master Yoruba talking drummer Shango Elecoto Yoyin. I

recognized complex rhythmic proportions in Ghanaian *gyil* from Afro-Cuban *batá* and *Abakuá* rhythms. I recognized parallels between Ewe and Ashanti drumming and Dahomey-based Haitian *vodu* drumming.

Also, as I interacted with primarily West African musicians, they began recognizing familiar musical elements in folkloric Cuban and Haitian musics. Thus, while scholarly West African rhythm&meter theories, such as C. K. Lejekpo's cross-rhythms, Richard Waterman's metronome sense and A. M. Jones' theories on pulse, mired me in metrical madness, my ears and experiences with West African musicians were helping me hear simple and clear relationships between the Cuban *clave* and traditional West African musics. I began intuiting the idea that most temporally specific West African musics, whether unaccompanied drumming, song, mixtures of drumming and singing or instrumental music, evince the *clave* concept, even though the Spanish term has no direct equivalence in any West African language. Moreover, the *clave*, though embodied in Spanish terminology intended for Latin music, is a fundamentally African concept that could not have arrived in the Caribbean or New York without slavery, colonization, and immigration.

The Spanish word *clave*, meaning “key” or “code,” has come to designate an entire complex of asymmetrical time-line patterns used to keep together, measure time, and dictate accents in Afro-Cuban musics. With its characteristic strong and weak halves, the *clave* creates an inherent sense of tension or metrical dissonance resolved to either downbeat cadences or mid-*clave* cadential resting pulses. The *clave* concept as an

analytical rubric for traditional West African musics is not a Eurocentric conceptual imposition on complex West African musical systems. Rather, the metrical connections between afro-Caribbean and West African musics evince *clave*'s unifying power, having made its way from West Africa to Cuba, Brazil, the United States, and other Diasporic lands, only to be brought back to bear upon West African traditional musics.

This case study provides a conceptual framework for the application of the Afro-Cuban *clave* concept to West African traditional musics. To that end, I compare the *clave*'s concepts to others used by ethnomusicologists in attempting to make sense of West African metrical structures and impart them to Western musicians. In making the case for *clave*, I first define such terms as pulse, time line, density referent, and periodicity, *clave*, *cinquillo*, and *tumbao*. I shall then formulate a theory of what happens when familiar musical elements travel, are mutually recognized by different cultures, are adopted and then adapted to suit each culture's aesthetic and theoretical needs. I then contextualize the *clave*'s heralding journey in terms of the near constant historical exchange between Africa, Europe and the New World. Finally, I compare the *clave*'s conceptual details with other analytical approaches to West African music taken from ethnomusicological literature, paying particular attention to ways in which the *clave* can facilitate understanding of hitherto mysterious African musical principles.

Why Rhythm?

Any cursory glance at the voluminous ethnomusicological literature pertaining to African music reveals a consistent preoccupation with rhythm, as though African music were primarily defined by it. Kofi Agawu, in a 1986 article "'Gi Dunu', 'Nyekpadudo,' and the Study Of West African Rhythm," surveys major contributors to the literature such as Merriam, Chernoff, and Locke, pointing out how the underlying assumption of West African music being tantamount to rhythm remains unchallenged.³⁶ It has furthermore been my experience, observing which aspects of African music consistently attract Westerners, that musicians often turn to African music for expansion of the typical rhythmic vocabulary consisting of classical meter, jazz swing, funk, reggae, and various grooves and improvisational matrixes found in pop, rock, and regional musics. While many Westerners have devoted their lives to the study of nonpercussive African musics such as Malian *kora*, pan-African *balaphon*, Shona *mbira*, or South African choral singing, it is clear from an examination of commercial marketing strategies involving African music that rhythm is most often pitched as a point of entry.

There are many plausible explanations for consistently enduring Western interest in African music. First, African percussion ensembles, typically consisting of interlocking drum parts and supporting bells and/or shakers, have historically provided an important cultural antidote to the traditional classical percussionist buried within the folds of an orchestra or the jazz and pop drummer typically responsible for providing a

³⁶ Kofi Agawu, "'Gi Dunu', 'Nyekpadudo,' and the Study of West African Rhythm," *Ethnomusicology* 30 no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 371-75.

rhythmic base and commentary to melodic and harmonic instruments. African percussion ensemble models have clearly influenced Western drum circle culture, encouraged dance studies, and facilitated many fruitful economic relationships between Western and African musicians. Second, Western musicians may feel intimidated by the intricacies of surrogate speech as applied to drumming, which often encourages them to seek out dance or social genres in which variation and virtuosity are extolled for musical purposes. The average Westerner is also reluctant to study African genres that would require intensive language study for praise singing or proverb recitations. Third, African instrumental and vocal timbres, microtonal temperaments, and lack of emphasis on Western notions of harmony may also prove off-putting. I thus postulate the premise that African music's rhythmic aspect has fascinated Western musicians and even ethnomusicologists because of its ubiquity and perhaps closer proximity to acceptable and attainable Western aesthetic models.

It is then highly ironic that African rhythm, which is so consistently attractive to Westerners, nonetheless remains a source of great analytical and practical confusion. The musician first encountering many West African musics may have trouble determining basic guiding concepts such as overall pulse, downbeat placement, and cyclical length. Such musicians will either persevere in their attempts to relate African rhythm to the guideposts they need or give up on the entire enterprise, concluding that African music is somehow too "other" and exotic to be framed by such concepts. Ethnomusicologists, in turn, have often considered the sociocultural ramifications of African musics, surmising

that the hierarchical and invariable relationships among instruments in ensembles is a microcosm of larger social structures. An excessive adherence to this approach can obfuscate issues of musical organization and structural relationships understood from a purely musical standpoint. It is therefore my hope to reconcile many of these outstanding polemics by applying the concept of the Cuban *clave* to West African music.

Pattern, Variation, and Difference

Through my own learning, performing and teaching experiences, as well as those of other Western musicians seeking to establish an intimate relationship with African and Afro-Cuban musics, one of the necessary key analytical abilities is to stop patterns, variations, and differences. There is a continuum between similitude, variation, derivation, and difference. For instance, the *clave* pattern's variants: *cinquillo*, amphibrach habanera and other rhythmic cells, are actually related by rhythmic rotation, augmentation and diminution, additive or subtractive variation, simplification, or displacement. *Clave* is not just another time line bell, rattle or hand clapping pattern; it is an entire rhythmic philosophy dealing with questions of symmetry and asymmetry, accentuation, periodicity, and polyrhythm.

Pulse and Time-Line *Topoi*

In *Drum Gahu*, David Locke discusses two interpretations of pulse:

In the additive perspective, notes are felt against a subjective background grid of short, equidistant ‘bits’ of time (pulses); the duration of tones is determined by adding together these small timing units. In the divisive perspective, emphasis is given to the polyrhythm between sounded notes and evenly-spaced, kinesthetically, and mentally marked moments in the flow of time (stresses or beats); duration is determined by the relationship between sounded strokes and felt beats.³⁷

Pulse can thus be conceived along a grid line of a density referent of the smallest rhythmic unit, or felt as a steady rhythm forming part of a polyrhythmic web. Issues of pulse are central to Western rhythmic practices because of the propensity for conscious counting and naming of beats in a measure and the reliance on clear physical signals, (for instance, from a conductor), indicating placement of the downbeat. The underlying pulse in many West African rhythms is often left silent or barely acknowledged with a tapping of the foot or a dance step.

Rather than being organized around an isochronous pulse, West African traditional ensembles are typically organized around a repeating time line pattern played by a bell, gong, rattles, shakers, or hand claps. Agawu defines such time line patterns thusly:

As is well known, many West and Central African dances feature a prominently articulated, recurring rhythmic pattern that serves as an identifying feature or signature of the particular dance/drumming. These patterns are known by different names: time line, bell pattern, phrasing referent, and so on. I prefer to

³⁷ David Locke, *Drum Gahu* (Crown Point, Indiana: White Cliffs Media Co., 1987), 17-18.

call them *topoi*, commonplaces rich in associative meaning for cultural insiders. A *topos* is a short, distinct, and often memorable rhythmic figure of modest duration (about a metric length or a single cycle), usually played by the bell or high-pitched instrument in the ensemble, and serves as a point of temporal reference. It is held as an ostinato throughout the dance-composition. Although *topoi* originated in specific communities as parts of specific dances, they have by now moved from their communities of origin into a centralized, multiethnic, or detribalized space. The main catalyst for this migration is interethnic contact through boarding schools, government bureaucracy, trade, rural-to-urban migration, church, cultural troupes, and radio. The connotations of some *topoi* have thus been abandoned or transformed, even while their structural autonomy has been consolidated.³⁸

In folkloric and popular Cuban musical contexts, “*la clave*” is such a *topos*, a short, memorable rhythmic figure imbued with rules regarding syncopation, stress, and cadence.

The following common time line patterns (or *topoi*) from African and Afro-Caribbean traditional musics alike demonstrate a structural similarity to the Cuban *clave*.

Ewe Tojo:



Ewe Agbekor:



Zambia:



³⁸ Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, and Positions* (London: Routledge, 2003), 73.

Haitian Rara:



Cinquillo:



Many time line patterns indicate the minimal cyclical span for melodic or percussion phrases. However, some time line *topoi* can be shorter than the smallest cyclical unit, causing them to be repeated twice or four times and within the span of a musical cycle. For instance, in the Cuban *tumba francesa* rhythm *Mas ón*, the *cat á* (wooden sticks) play the *cinquillo* on the side of the lead drum. Yet that drum's signature phrases are twice as long as the *cinquillo* itself.

It is common knowledge that many West African ensemble musics are based on time line patterns, from which all supporting and lead parts establish a frame of reference. In Ewe drumming, the downbeat of each time line cycle is often marked by the lower bell of a pair played by a single musician. Shawn Hennessey suggests that, according to the Agbeli family, this practice was mainly developed for the benefit of Western students.³⁹ Although all *clave* patterns correspond to binary rhythmic cycles that can be used as musical periods, not all time line bell patterns are synonymous with *clave* cycles; some are half the *clave*'s length, while others are twice or thrice its length. In the Ewe rhythm

³⁹ Shawn Hennessey, personal communication with author, November 2007.

Tojo, the *gankogui* bell plays the amphibrach pattern: [Xx0x x0x0] while the *kaganu*, *kidi*, *sogo*, and *atzimevu* complete 12/8 structures using the same density referent of the eighth note. The dance rhythm *Bamaaya* uses a *clave* neutral shaker pattern of: [X0xx x0xx] which is identical to the *güiro* pattern used in *changüí*, *chachachá* and *pachanga*, as well as the hand bell or campana pattern used in *salsa*. Against this simple rhythmic cell, the lead drum's matrix is based on the pattern:



which is obviously a *clave* cycle. If the time line pattern were the only reference, the lead drum would have no basis for *clave* alignment. The social dance and protest rhythm Kinka employs the simplified cinquillo bell: [X00x 00x0], which must be played twice to complete a single *clave* cycle. However, other instruments in the ensemble play shorter or longer cycles. The *kaganu*'s pattern is simply: [00xx 00xx] which is half as long as the *gankogui*, while the *atzimevu* plays phrases of one, two, and four *claves* in length.

Both traditional West African and folkloric Afro-Cuban ensembles span a continuum between rigidly fixed and relatively simple parts and improvisations within sets of parameters that can include surrogate speech, signals for dancers, and purely musical phrases. James Koetting in his 1970 article "Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music," defines pattern as: "the longest consecutively repeating

sequence"⁴⁰ Koetting arrives at this definition as an antidote to what he considers the Western tendency to reduce musical phrases to such infinitesimal fractional divisions that they no longer hold together as viably repeating patterns. Patterns can be as short as two notes or as long as time line cycles. They can establish pulses or contribute syncopation or consistent offbeat accentuation to pre-established pulses.

In both Afro-Cuban folkloric and West African drumming ensembles, pattern length is often linked to drum pitch and size. Hewitt Pantaleoni writes in "Three Principles of Rhythm in Anlo Dance Drumming" that many West African ensembles organize the complexity of drum patterns in descending pitch order from simplest and highest to most complex and lowest.⁴¹ This is also true of the three hourglass-shaped *batá* drums used in *Lukumí* rituals: *Okónkolo* (highest pitched and smallest sized), *Itótele* (mid-pitched and mid-sized) and *Iyá* (lowest pitched and largest sized). Of these, the *okónkolo* plays the simplest patterns while the *itótele* and *iyá* execute longer interlocking patterns and two types of modular conversations: melodic and alternating call and response.

To the Western ear accustomed to hearing a steady repetitious bass and melodic or rhythmic material above it, many forms of West African musics can sound initially disorienting, requiring the ear to focus on lower sounds for improvisation. The density referent (or N-cycle) is the smallest structural unit common to all pulses, time line

⁴⁰ James Koetting, "Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music," *Selected Reports* 1 (no.3) (Institute of Ethnomusicology, UCLA: 1970): 121.

⁴¹ Hewitt Pantaleoni, "Three Principles of Rhythm in Anlo Dance Drumming," *African Music* 5 no.2 (1970): 50-63.

patterns, supporting and lead parts in a given rhythm. James Koetting calls this the fastest pulse, while acknowledging that, in terms of strict rhythmic density, grace notes, flams and other ornamental rhythmic durations can be smaller than the fastest pulse. All rhythmic cycles can be thought of as being a total number of fastest pulses, while what Koetting calls gross beats or pulses can be equal subdivisions of this total.

In terms of time line *topoi*, supporting ensemble parts and lead improvisations, the Cuban *clave* is a relatively flexible structure, accommodating phrases of any duration, provided that they cadence on the *clave*'s appropriate pulse. The Cuban *clave* therefore behaves as a West African time line *topos* while also allowing for patterns and improvisations of longer and shorter cyclical durations. These examples illustrate the idea that, even if African musicians have no direct terms for pulse, downbeat, rhythmic cycle, or *clave*, all these structures are clearly employed in combination. African musicians often assert that every lead or supporting phrase or pattern is based around the time line bell. Yet, these examples show that the time line bell can be shorter or longer than other parts, or that supporting parts like the *kaganu* can be half as short as the time line bell patterns themselves.

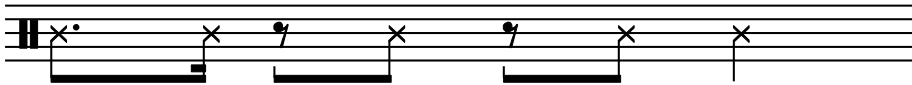
Thus far, we have mainly analyzed the structures of Ghanaian Ewe drumming as prototypes of the time line concept. Other overtly timeline oriented traditions include Ashanti royal drumming and dance, Akan drumming and the *jembe* traditions of Guinea and Mali. Other West African traditions, however, do not employ overt time line patterns. These include Senegalese *sabar*, Ghanaian Dagomba *dondon* and Yoruba *batá*.

Defining the Cuban *Clave*

Christopher Washburne, in his 1998 article "Play It *Con Filin*," defines *clave* as follows:

Clave is a rhythmic concept found in a variety of Latin American musical styles. In Spanish, the word literally means key, clef, code, or key stone. *Claves* are two wooden sticks hit together to produce a high, piercing sound. In Latin music terminology the word *clave* refers not only to these instruments but also to the specific rhythmic patterns played by them and the underlying rules which govern these patterns.⁴²

All musical and dance components in *salsa* performance are governed by the *clave* rhythm. The *clave* rhythm found in *salsa*, known as *son clave*, is notated as:



The rhythm may be actually played or, more often, simply implied. Competent *salsa* musicians develop a "*clave* sense" similar to what Waterman labels a "metronome sense," whereby a subjective pulse serving as an ordering principle is felt by the participants in a musical event.⁴³ As Steve Cornelius writes, the *clave* pattern is two measures in length "in which each measure is diametrically opposed. The two measures are not at odds, but rather, they are balanced opposites like positive and negative, expansive and contractive, or the poles of a magnet. As the full pattern is repeated, an alteration from one polarity to the other takes place creating pulse and rhythmic drive."⁴⁴ If adhered to with the proper

⁴² Christopher Washburne, "Play It *Con Filin*: The Swing and Expression of *Salsa*," *Latin American Music Review* 19 no.2 (1998): 160-185.

⁴³ Richard Waterman, *African Influence on the Music of the Americas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

⁴⁴ Steve Cornelius, 1991, 15-16.

feels, the *clave* provides the swing in *salsa*.⁴⁵ Peter Manuel defines *clave* as a binary cycle of two asymmetrical halves, one containing syncopated pulses and the other containing regular ones.⁴⁶ He points out that this definition of *clave* becomes problematic when considering the standard 12/8 bell pattern found throughout West Africa:



If the definition of *clave* is broadened and released from dualistic notions of syncopated versus regular pulses, the 12/8 bell falls within the matrix of *clave* as a binary asymmetrical construct containing three main pulses in one half and two in the other:



The *clave* was undoubtedly one of a myriad interrelated time line bell patterns that accompanied slaves to the New World. In Cuba, duple- and triple-metered bell patterns were discovered to follow identical structures of cyclical organization, subdivision and accentuation, and were thus grouped together, given a name,

⁴⁵ Washburne, "Con Filin'."

⁴⁶ Peter Manuel, interview with author, November 2007.

standardized, codified, and used as the basis of all Afro-Cuban folkloric and popular musics.

Recognition

Adoption and Adaptation

Amanda Vincent, in her landmark 2006 dissertation *Batá Conversations*, discusses Michael Marcuzzi's concept of transatlantic separation "as an alternative to the hierarchical concept of Africa being inherently more musically authentic and therefore credible than its diaspora. Rather than appropriating the African-American popular metaphor of homeland African traditions being the 'root' and diasporic traditions being the 'branches and leaves,' the term 'trans-Atlantic separation' invokes an imagined point where the two branches diverted from the same tree trunk."⁴⁷ Since the Cuban *clave* and many of its variants appear in traditional and popular West African musics either as bell patterns, rattle pulses, or interlocking clapping sequences, it is almost impossible to state definitively whether such seeming coincidences are random byproducts of a clear and linear diffusion process. It logically follows that a continuous process of mutual adoption and adaptation has been at work between Latin-America and Africa. Africa and its Diasporic offshoots have been incorporating features of each other's cultures since their

⁴⁷ Amanda Vincent, "Batá Conversations: Guardianship and Entitlement Narratives about the Batá in Nigeria and Cuba" (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2006): 18-22, 32-35.

first intersections, which is why so many seemingly unintelligible cultural features remain mutually recognizable.

Where's the Beat?

One of the most confounding aspects of many West African musics is the question of meter and its related manifestation as pulse. Many Western students and scholars have come to believe that African musicians primarily relate interlocking parts to one another and are thus dependent on their presence in order to situate each new part's entrance. In conversations with Ewe drumming students and *jembefolas*, I have consistently heard frustration at the fact that many African musicians seem entirely unable to conceptualize time, meter, pulse, and patterns in terms of Western notions of downbeats, syncopation, and rhythmic cycles. John Chernoff writes:

The inadequacy of Western efforts at notation and the clumsiness of Western efforts at participation reflect the basic problem: we can choose any of several rhythmic approaches, yet we have no way to judge the proper one. To a more sensitive ear, the flexible and dynamic relationships of various rhythms actually help distinguish one rhythm from another, and on a basic level, one rhythm defines another. One drum played alone gives an impression of a rhythm tripping along clumsily or senselessly accented; however, a second rhythm can make sense of the first.⁴⁸

In a sense, the entire analytical process related to West African rhythm, whether for scholarly or performance purposes, revolves around finding the best rhythmic

⁴⁸ John Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 52.

approach among many possible ones, the most succinct, flexible, and easily applicable approach encompassing all necessary parameters and resolving as much ambiguity as possible. Communicative chasms between very different linguistic systems do not clarify such ambiguities. If an Ewe drummer has no words in his language for beat, downbeat, or measure, he may try to deflect questions about these terms, leading the Western student to conclude that these concepts do not exist for him. Yet, recent scholarship and Western learning experiences are beginning to tell a different story. Kofi Agawu suggests that part of the apparent lack of African emic terms for meter, pulse, and downbeat results from the simple fact that in many African languages, numbers are not single syllables and are thus difficult to count in time to a pulse:

In teaching the 3+3+2 pattern, an English speaker would repeat “one-two-three-one-two-three-one-two” several times. But try saying the Ewe equivalent: c[eka-eve-eto-c[eka-eve-eto-c[eka-eve], and you will see that it works less well. The excess of syllables in the Ewe version produces an awkwardness that undermines its likelihood as a reflection of indigenous pedagogy. And it is for reasons like this that the entire durational-quantitative approach to African rhythm needs to be rethought.⁴⁹

Much of the ethnomusicological literature about West African ensemble music concurs that most ensemble performances are either begun by the time line bell or the master drummer playing the time line pattern to set the appropriate tempo. James Koetting writes:

⁴⁹ Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 89.

Each intermediate drum and lesser drum, rattle, and gong enters at a certain place—or one of several permissible places—in the pattern of the previously entering player with whom he has a primary time relation, meaning that the two adjust their timing first to each other and only after that to the other performers. After his entrance each player joins the others in making the various timing adjustments necessary even in the best groups to achieve the proper pattern relationships that will fulfill the nature of the piece.

The basic gong pattern is considered the central timing for the piece, subject to changes imposed by the master drum and also sometimes voluntary adjustments by the gong whenever a number of supporting instruments have inadvertently shifted their timing. Each supporting drum, rattle, or gong player usually performs his pattern in primary time relation with the basic gong or some one or two other instruments, and in secondary time relation with the gong if his primary relation is with another instrument or instruments. He also performs in an overall time relation with all other instruments, and in a peripheral time relation with the melodic instrumentalists and the singers and dancers.⁵⁰

Herein lies some of the conceptual confusion Westerners encounter when trying to establish where the beat or pulse actually is. Since African musicians often conceive of their parts as relating not only to the time line pattern but to other parts, it is often difficult to separate individual parts and relate each one to a central pulse or meter. The interrelation of supporting parts with one another and toward the time line bell is only one way in which West African musicians delineate pulse. Agawu, Chernoff, Locke, and other scholars have all vehemently maintained that West African music, in terms of what is audible, is only one component of a sociocultural event; the other is the dance. When asked how he thinks Africans show pulse, my *batá* student Shawn Hennessey asserted that Africans have various ways of conveying pulse through gesture, weight, and dance:

⁵⁰ Koetting, "Analysis and Notation," 122.

"Sometimes, it might be something in the shoulders or a head nod."⁵¹ John Amira asserts that Haitian, Cuban and African dancers "always know where the pulse and downbeat are; without them, there wouldn't be any dance. You can't have dance without pulse."⁵² And Locke suggests that students mimic the gestures used by Ghanaian drummers and dancers in feeling the music—gestures which also consistently coincide with structural pulses and meters.⁵³

Pulse, Additive, and Divisive Rhythm

Many African music scholars distinguish between additive and divisive rhythm. Additive rhythm groups a total number of beats into equal or unequal subdivisions based on phrase lengths. Divisive rhythm subdivides a total number of beats equally, creating a steady pulse. Some early scholars, for instance, believed the standard 12/8 bell pattern to be in two unequal measures of five and seven beats respectively. This is additive rhythm at its most literal level. For such a misunderstanding to be immortalized in print, additive rhythm had to be used to the exclusion of the density referent of 12 pulses. Had such a cycle been perceived, it would have been easy to divide twelve notes into two groups of six, three groups of four, four groups of three, or six groups of two, each of which would have yielded a different steady pulse. Drummers, bell players, singers, instrumentalists, and dancers often prefer to subdivide the total number of density referent durations in the

⁵¹ Shawn Hennessey, personal communication with author, November 2007.

⁵² John Amira, personal communication with author, October 2007.

⁵³ Locke, *Drum Gahu*.

cycle in ways that align best with their individual parts. Thus, the *gankogui* player might feel *tojo* in duple meter, while the *kaganu*, *kidi*, and *sogo* might feel it in triple meter, either in 6/8 or 3/4. There can thus be many competing pulses, all interrelated by both the density referent and the cyclical length or period. No single pulse for the entire ensemble need reign supreme, although all musicians need to be able to feel each other's pulses in order to play precisely together. In this sense, many West African musics are polymensural in that they divide a cyclical length into different equal pulses, any one of which can be selected by each musician if it helps them feel their part more comfortably. The rattle, shaker, or dancer might elect one of these pulses or conceptualize their part as being built around a central pulse, even while remaining aware that other members of the ensemble may subdivide the cyclical period into a different number of equally spaced pulses. In addition, the period length can be used as the total unit to be divided into alternate fast pulses.

It is in this manner that Yoruba *batá* players can play triplets against sixteenth notes by subdividing the gross pulse, (to borrow fourteenth-century Ars Nova terms), into both perfect (triple) and imperfect (duple) prolations. Chernoff writes:

The musicians themselves maintain an additional beat, as has often been observed, by moving some part of their body while they play, not in the rhapsodic manner of a violinist but in a solid regular way. Those people who have said that drummers dance while they play were right in the sense that the drummers keep the beat in this way so that their off-beat drumming will be precise. The point is that a drummer plays only some of the things he hears.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Chernoff, *African Rhythm*, 50.

By the phrase "an additional beat," Chernoff is referring to both a pulse and a rhythmic figure against which specific phrases are felt as reinforcements or syncopations. If a time line is being played, the hidden beat internalized by a West African musician obviously need not be that of the time line pattern itself.

Meter

In his 1982 article "Principles of Offbeat Timing and Cross Rhythm in Southern Ewe Dance Drumming," David Locke catalogs the meters found in Ewe music:

Pulses, evenly spaced and unchanging divisions of each beat, reinforce precise timing in the polyrhythmic context. Southern Ewe dance drumming is either binary (two or four pulses per beat) or ternary (three or six pulses per beat). Meter is determined by the time span of the bell pattern and its division by beats. Four meters commonly are used: 2/4, 4/4, 6/8 and 12/8. In ternary music, the fundamental meter and main beats co-exist With countermeters (2/4, 3/4, 6/4, 3/2, and 4/4) and counterbeats (in 12/8: three half notes, six quarter notes, and eight dotted eighth notes), which may or may not be emphasized by rhythm patterns but always are implicit in the basic meter.⁵⁵

Thus, in many West African musics, there is no abstract concept of meter or rhythmic cycles independent of their purely musical contexts. A Westerner might be able to tap out a steady pulse and conceive of that meter as being 2/4, 3/4, 5/8, 7/16, etc. Of course, the rhythmic cycle being conceived is only revealed either through accentuation or the music that utilizes it. The dualistic implication is that Western music sets out to be

⁵⁵ David Locke, "Principles of Offbeat Timing and Cross-Rhythm in Southern Ewe Dance Drumming," *Ethnomusicology* 26 no. 2 (1982), 244.

composed or improvised within a given meter, while African music determines the meter based on its constituent parts. Neither of these assumptions contain absolute truth.

Western classical music, from fourteenth-century Ars Nova mensural experiments in the Chantilly Codex to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, contain large sections in which musical or rhythmic phrases prescribe ever changing time signatures for each measure.

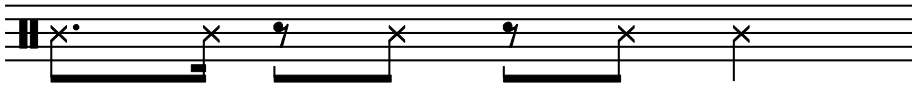
I recall learning one Yoruba *oriki* to Obalu-Aye from Shango Elekoto Yoyin in which both phrases fell evenly into a binary structure, yet a mandatory rest between them made the entire proverb cycle unevenly against a binary pulse or time line pattern played on the *gudu-gudu*. Plenty of examples in West African music contain a steady collection of time line and supporting patterns with a lead instrument improvising in ways that either jettison the time line structure, multiply it into larger periods, or subdivide it into cross-rhythms. In many West African rhythms, different instruments can play patterns or phrases that take up varying cyclical lengths, superimposing them upon one another until the proper point of intersection is reached. Many of these superimposed cycle lengths are ultimately divisible by 2 and 3, hence the popular conception of 3 against 2. However, multiplicative rhythmic formulae may be used to determine how many cycles of one pattern must elapse before a pattern of a different cycle length will be once again in the same relationship as it was from the beginning. The pattern [X0x0x000] must repeat thrice to complete two cycles of the 12/8 Agbekor or Agbaja bell. Against 3/2 *son clave*, the five-beat phrase, [X0xx0], using the same density referent, must be played sixteen times to end up on the downbeat of a sixth *clave* cycle.

Toward Agawu's proposed rethinking, it may be possible to use deductive reasoning first to determine which actual organizational principles West Africans actually use and how those principles dovetail with Western concepts of pulse and meter. To that end, let us examine the Cuban *clave*'s conceptual utility.

Clave, Pulse, and Meter

All *clave* patterns are inherently binary, containing two asymmetrical halves, whether the pattern is notated in 2/4, 4/4, 6/8 or 12/8:

Son Clave:



This is the most popular *clave* pattern known throughout the African Diaspora and around the world: it is the “hambone” or “Bo Diddley” rhythm.

Rumba Clave:



This *clave* pattern delays the *ponche* (third pulse) and is thus often incorrectly counted “1 2, 1 2 3.”

Danzón Clave:

This is one of the oldest examples of a *clave* pattern combining the additive 3+3+2 *tresillo* cell with the isochrony of the French *contradanse*.



or:

*Clave Seis Por Ocho:*

This is a ubiquitous ternary *clave* pattern, often called the “*bembe* bell”.

Clave Abakuá:

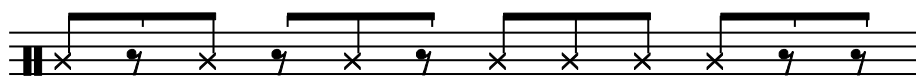
This is a simplified version of the *bembe* bell time line *topos* used for rituals of the Cuban *Abakuá*, an all-male “secret” society/ fraternity.

Guataca Arará:

This is the bell pattern used for Dahomey-derived Afro-Cuban songs, drum rhythms and dances.

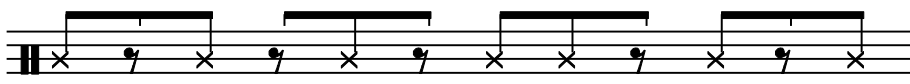
Guataca de Palo:

This is the pattern used in the Afro-Cuban *congo*-derived Palo Mayombe and Kimbisi spiritual traditions.

Guataca de Yuka:

This is the stick pattern used to hold together songs, rhythms and dances in the *congo*-derived Yuka, a social tradition in which the songs often consist of vague riddles.

Haitian Yanvalu Bell:



Like the *Guataca* Arará above, this Dahomey-driven Haitian bell pattern is the basis for many ternary rhythms including Yanvalu, Zepol, and Mayi. I first learned these rhythms as an adolescent from New York folkloric percussionist John Amira.

Whether called a *clave* pattern, *guataca*, *gankogui* or time line bell, all these patterns serve the purpose of providing a short rhythmic *topos* to orient drum parts, rattles or shakers, songs, and dances. If all *clave* structures are binary, it follows that they relate to binary meters such as 2/4, 4/4 or 4/2. A common misconception regarding *clave* is that the *son clave*, known as the “hambone rhythm” in America and popular throughout Latin-America as the basis for *salsa*, is the only *clave*. In a 2007 telephone communication, Peter Manuel suggested that *clave*-oriented analysis of West African music might be problematic when dealing with African rhythms in 6/8 or 12/8, as though there were no *clave* patterns for these.⁵⁶ All the ternary *clave* patterns enumerated above divide a 4/4 measure into four groups of triplets. Were a pulse to be tapped against any of these patterns, it would be in 4/4. C. K. Lejekpo teaches his students to play the standard 12/8 *gankogui* time line for slow Agbekor while tapping the 4/4 pulse against it. If the student is counting the *gankogui* in 12/8 or two measures of 6/8, the steady pulse will be conceptualized as dotted quarters. Whether ternary *clave* is felt in 3/4, 6/8 or 12/8, the structural possibility always exists for it to be felt in 4/4 with each beat divided into triplets, which is how ternary *clave* is conceptualized in Cuba.

⁵⁶ Peter Manuel, interview with author, 2007.

Time Lines

Chernoff, in *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* describes the Dagomba ensemble:

The Dagombas mainly use a drum commonly called *dondon* in West Africa. It is a tension drum, carved in the shape of an hourglass, with two mouths; the two skins, thinned almost to parchment and sewn onto rings of bound reeds, are laced together with leather strings. A Dagomba drummer fits his *dondon* under his arm, securing it with a scarf or a strip of cloth looped over his shoulder. Wrapping his arm around the drum and hooking his thumb through several strings, the drummer turns his wrist outwards to push his forearm against the strings and thus vary or resonate the notes he can produce.

Besides *dondon*, the Dagombas use a large tom-tom with a snare of hide stretched across the top section of each of the two large circular drumheads. The drumheads are set over the drum with loops of rope and laced with heavy strings of cowhide; leather straps around these strings are pulled to tighten the drumhead before use. Called *gongon*, the drum hangs like *dondon* from one shoulder, and the drummers can walk around or dance when they play. The *gongon* drummer rests his arm so that his hand extends over the edge of the drum and his fingers rest lightly on the skin.

Both *dondon* and *gongon* are beaten with a special stick which curves more than ninety degrees and which has a bell-shaped knob on the end. The drummer holds this stick across the palm of his hand and beats the drum by flicking his wrist. He mutes a beat by turning his stick slightly so that the edge of the bell-shaped knob "stops" against the drumhead. The *gongon* player can also beat with his hand and his stick along the upper edge of the drumhead, getting a higher-pitched buzzing sound, or he can press his fingers against the skin to alter the quality of his main beats.⁵⁷

As a structural alternative to the time line, it is noteworthy that Dagomba drumming is not oriented around any overt time line patterns. Yet, clavecized phrases about in lead and supporting *dondon* and *gongon* parts, whether in duple or triple meters. My analysis of Dagomba *dondon* and *gongon* patterns and phrases reveals that

⁵⁷ Chernoff, *African Rhythm*, 43-44.

clavecization is achieved and maintained primarily through period lengths and accentuations. Regardless of meter, Dagomba supporting *dondon* and *gongon* patterns tend to align themselves with the typical *clave* accentuation scheme: the first half being syncopated and the second containing more regularly spaced pulses.

Both Cuban and Nigerian *batá* are most often played without any instruments keeping a time line pattern, although Yoruba *batá* are sometimes played with accompanying shakers and Matanzas *batá* are often played with a small *maraca* called *acheré* which confines itself mainly to marking of an underlying pulse or various specific *clave* patterns. Amanda Villepastour and Michael Marcuzzi point out that it is difficult to categorize either the Cuban or Nigerian *batá* traditions as preservationist or open to modern change because both traditions have changed over centuries, albeit in different organological and structural ways.

In terms of differences in playing technique between Yoruba and Afro-Cuban *batá*, Villepastour has investigated museum paintings, preserved instruments, photographic evidence and missionary journal accounts. She speculates that the Yoruba *batá*, like their Cuban counterparts, were once played horizontally using one hand on each drum head. Shango Elekoto Yoyin calls this “*batá koto*.” Partially as a stylistic variant and partially for aesthetic issues of projection, the smaller heads of Yoruba *batá*, called *sasa*, began to be played with a leather beater called *bilal*. A parallel process developed in Matanzas, Cuba, where the drums began to be played with a leather strap in the shape of a slipper, often called *chancleta* in Spanish. Whereas the Cuban *batá* battery

has always been restricted to three drums (*iyá*, *itótele*, and *okónkolo*), Yoruba ensembles can have between four and six drums: *iya alu*, *omele abo*, *omele ako*, *omele meta* and *kudi*. For spiritual reasons involving associations between the deity Ogun and metal objects, no metal bells or gongs are permissible to be played with either Cuban or Nigerian *batá*, which of course eliminates the bells, hoe blades, and gongs so often used as time line keepers.

While Cuban *okónkolo* parts tend not to outline *clave* cycles or accentuations, Yoruba *kudi*, and *omele meta* patterns definitely do. Examples include: Yoruba *Kudi* for Duple Rhythms: [Hllh llhh llhl hlll] Yoruba *Kudi* for Ternary Rhythms: [Hlh lh-hh lhlh lh-hh] Against such clavecized patterns, the lead drum, *iya alu*, can converse freely using a system of surrogate speech in which the open, muted and slap sounds on the low head correspond to Yoruba tones and accentuations on the *sasa* correspond to diphthongs and consonants. The *omele abo* can either converse with the *iya alu* or reinforce its tonal phrases using the same sounds but taking advantage of the drum's smaller size and higher pitch to contribute greater tonal variety. Cuban *batá*'s surrogate speech consists of phrases often chanted in *clave*, such as *Iyankotá* for Babalú Ayé or *Elekotó* for Agayú.

Thus far, we have seen that *clave* is a convenient analytical tool for questions of meter, pulse, and time line patterns for a number of reasons: since its length is fixed, there can be no doubt as to the meter it represents. Since its asymmetrical binary structure is sufficiently abstract, it flexibly applies to a host of time line patterns without losing its structural importance. Since the *clave*'s halves are measured at the level of the gross pulse

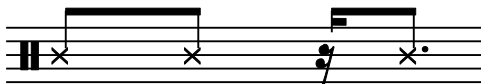
rather than the fastest pulse, polyrhythms within its confines can be easily executed by subdividing the gross pulse into the necessary subdivisions for the polyrhythm in question. *Clave* can be used to designate accentuation patterns for periods larger than time line patterns or supporting parts without disturbing how players of those parts feel those patterns. The *clave* matrix also offers a structurally authentic basis from which syncopations, rhythmic displacements and polymeters can be successfully understood, analyzed and negotiated in performance.

Clave, Rotation, and Displacement

Since all time line patterns are cyclical and since cycles are inherently circular, students and scholars of West African musics have long observed that there are different perceptible points of emphasis situating the beginnings of time line patterns. If a pattern can be viably positioned throughout different pulses in a cycle, it contains displaced equivalents. If its pulses can be rotated so that an alternate pulse in the pattern begins the cycle, the pattern contains rotational equivalents. For instance, the Ewe mark the bell for Kinka as:



while the Akan employ a rotation of that same pattern beginning on the same downbeat:



The Akan bell rotates the Ewe parallel to the Cuban *cinquillo* by placing its last beat on the downbeat. Upon first hearing Akan social dance music using this pattern, I instinctively felt the *clave* in its customary *cinquillo* position before being summarily corrected. It can thus be useful to recognize rotations and displacements of the same patterns, grouping them together for easy reference. The so-called "*bembe* wheel" takes the standard 12/8 time line and rotates it so that each of its pulses can begin on the downbeat:

1.



2.



3.



and so forth.

Rotations can thus be distinguished from displacements as follows: rotations situate a pattern's sounded pulses on the downbeat, whereas displacements shift the pattern's pulses either on to other gross pulses or on to the fast pulses between them. Thus, the first displacement of the 12/8 time line is:



Familiarity with rotational and displaced equivalences can aid both the ethnomusicologist and student, narrowing possibilities for temporal reference points upon which the downbeat, in all likelihood, can be placed. For the ethnomusicologist concerned with crosscultural diffusion, it can be interesting to track rhythmic patterns across neighboring geographical areas, or, as in the case of the trans-Atlantic separation, between West Africa and its Diasporas in Latin-America, the Caribbean, and the United States. Since recorded music has only been part of our lexicon for a little more than a century, we have little evidence of how musics were played 150 or 300 years ago.

As Western classical early music specialists have realized, even elaborate notation often fails to convey important details of performance practice. Before recordings of non-Western musics were possible to make and distribute, our knowledge of then-current performance practice often depended upon poorly conceptualized (if well-intentioned) transcriptions that often failed to indicate correct meters, pitch ranges, or tuning systems. As this study has demonstrated, shifting populations are often only able to retain selective elements of musical structures when cut off from their native lands, whether by captivity or immigration. We have also observed that Afro-Diasporic elements have been making the return journey back to Africa as early as the nineteenth century, influencing many aspects of society including the conceptualization and making of music. It is thus

plausible that the Ewe may have once felt their equivalent to the *cinquillo* time line in the same position relative to the downbeat as the Akan, but may have shifted it in response to Cuban-based popular musics or highlife. This process may have also occurred as a result of inaccurate memorization and understanding or sheer musical creativity. As various African musics are now possible to be sonically compared to Afro-Diasporic equivalents, many such fascinating conjectures regarding rhythmic structures, repertoire, instruments, performance techniques, and shifting sociocultural contexts can be put forth. As today's ethnomusicologists seek greater and more durably intimate relationships with non-Western cultures, musicians and repertoires, scholarly insights regarding hitherto unfamiliar musical structures can only evolve.

The very process of using the Cuban *clave* as a rhythmic rubric for West African traditional music is of itself already a fundamental decontextualization of West African and Afro-Diasporic musics from their original sociocultural milieu. Yet, a certain ideologically purist strain persistently pervades certain scholarly circles, most likely an over-correction of Eurocentric colonial biases. Western analytical concepts are inherently etic and suspect, rendering them inappropriate for non-Western musics. This selective conceptual permissiveness is indeed ironic because ethnomusicologists frame non-Western musical concepts using analogues in Western languages. Why, for instance, is there such a vast literature concerning West African rhythm when scholars affirm that few West African languages have words for rhythm, meter, polymeter, and time line? Why has the standard 12/8 time line been arbitrarily compared to the Western 12-note

chromatic scale, with its natural notes forming the speaking pulses of the time line and the accidentals constituting its rests?

Cuban *Clave* and Metrical Theory

At the heart of nearly all Cuban folkloric and popular musics lies the *clave*, a Spanish word meaning “key” or “code.” It is a non-isochronous, asymmetrical rhythmic pattern dividing eight pulses into five unevenly spaced attacks⁵⁸ The *clave*’s 3+3+2 first half, the 3-side, (called *tresillo*), is a simplification of the five-pulse *cinquillo* pattern.

cinquillo:



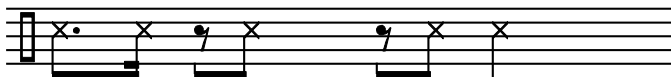
cinquillo rotation as amphibrach:



Many *timba* musicians have told me that whereas *salsa* and earlier Cuban genres are primarily based on *son clave*, *timba* draws its impetus from *rumba clave*. By delaying its third pulse, *rumba clave* encourages greater syncopation as vocal phrases, chords, and breaks conclude upon it.

⁵⁸ Mark Butler, *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 85.

3-2 *son* *clave*



3-2 *rumba* *clave*:

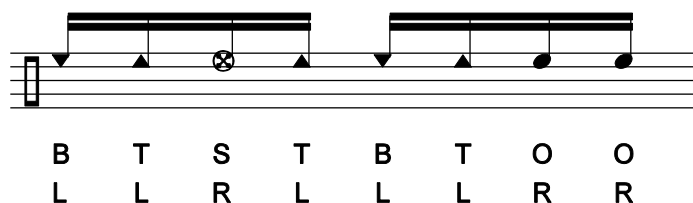


Timba also makes extensive use of syncopated crossbeat triplets, which are often difficult to notate. Many of these offbeat triplet phrases make use of the rhythmic comma between multiples of 2 and 3. This is how triplet phrases can be interchangeable with *tresillo* phrases. These triplets are perceived within the 12/8 *bembe* *clave* framework, as follows:



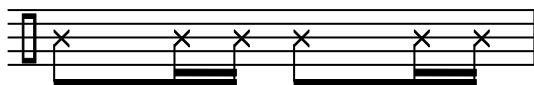
For Cuban musicians and dancers, the *clave* pattern is a metrical accentuation framework atop the larger 4/4 metrical grid. However, a smaller metrical layer also exists, upon which *clave* neutral patterns are built. These patterns usually take up a quarter to half of a *clave* cycle.

Isochronous *conga marcha*:



B=bass; T=tip; S=slap; O=open tone; L=left hand; R=right hand

Isochronous *güiro* or *campana* pattern:



Anticipated Bass *Bombo/Ponche* Pattern:



Of these *clave* neutral patterns, the *campana* emphasizes all four downbeats, while the anticipated bass often obliges harmonies to resolve before downbeats.

Moreover, since the combined effect of conga, bass, and harmonic resolutions on the *ponche* comprise a stronger accent than the *campana*'s downbeats, many Cuban non-musicians in fact perceive these pickups as points of rhythmic and harmonic resolution

Syncopated:



The 'Trio' section consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each with a single eighth note on the first line (F#4) and a single eighth note on the second line (G4). The second staff begins with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each with a single eighth note on the first line (F#3) and a single eighth note on the second line (G3). The music is written in a simple, folk-like style with a consistent rhythm.

Many of Cuban/Latin piano's most basic stock patterns are derived from the *tres guajeos*; in keeping with their nearly constant syncopations, these piano *tumbao* patterns contain only a single downbeat. When placed on the *clave* pattern's 2-side, (which contains no downbeat), the effect of these patterns is often perceived as *contra-clave*,

⁵⁹ García, *Rodríguez*, 64-92.

(literally: against the *clave*). Yet, the placing of rhythmic downbeats and harmonic progression beginnings on the *clave*'s 2-side has been a feature of Cuban popular and folkloric musics since the 1930s. I have elsewhere called this phenomenon "the great *clave* shift". During that time, composers, arrangers and musicians began favoring isochronous rather than tresillo phrases as cyclical starts, in contrast to *danzón* and *son*, where harmonic and melodic phrases were usually tied to the *clave*'s 3-side, the *tresillo*, whose first pulse clearly falls on the downbeat.

Rumba, Clave, and Authenticity

Further enshrining the "great *clave* shift" was a marked change in *rumba guaguancó* developed by the 1950s. Groups such as Los Muñequitos de Matanzas and Los Papines began shifting the *tres dos* (second supporting drum) from the *clave*'s 3-side to its 2-side, creating an unmistakably contra-*clave* relationship between the *tres dos* and the *rumba clave* pattern. When aligned with the *clave*'s 3-side, the *tres do*'s two tones (in Havana style) and single tone (in Matanzas style) coincide with the *clave*'s first two pulses. But when shifted to the *clave*'s 2-side, this *tres dos* pattern's one or two open tones rhythmically complement the *clave*'s 2-side rather than reinforce it. Many Cuban *rumberos* maintain that this shift cleared a metrical space for the *quinto* (lead drum) to mark dance steps and solo, with the shifted *tres dos* fulfilling a conversationally responsorial role.

Soon after the *guaguancó clave* shift had supplanted the older *clave* aligned style, a musical, cultural, and ethnic chasm opened that has not entirely closed. Puerto Rican and Nuyorican *congueros* maintained the older *clave* aligned orientation for the *tres dos*, while most Cuban *congueros* adopted the contra-*clave* version. Thus, upon being exposed to Puerto Rican and Nuyorican *salsa songs* with *guaguancó* sections, Cuban percussionists developed a contemptuous attitude toward this *clave* orientation issue, insisting to me many times that Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans don't play *rumba* correctly. Upon reminding them that the *clave*-aligned *tres dos* is not a Latin invention, but rather an older Cuban *rumba* style, many of these detractors have had to rethink their contempt.

Clave Counterpoint

As melodic and harmonic periodicity began favoring the *clave*'s 2-side over the 3-side, a curious divide surfaced between the percussion section and the rest of the melodic/harmonic instruments in the Cuban/Latin popular music ensemble. In sections where the the melodic or harmonic phrase begins on the 3-side, aligned with the *clave* pattern's downbeat, many percussion patterns have already shifted their primary accents to the *clave*'s 2-side. This creates a counterpoint of cyclical stress, with the percussion's cyclical starts falling on the opposite *clave* side as the 3-side melodic/harmonic phrases. This is why many contemporary Cuban musicians interpret songs such as "Idilio" and "Capullito de Alelí" in 2-3 rather than 3-2 *clave*. To do this, the rhythms of these songs'

phrases are slightly altered to fit better in 2-3 *clave* than in 3-2. The rhythm for the opening of “Capullito de Alelí” is [X0xx 0xx0] and the altered 2-3 version is [X0xx 0x0x].

Since “Capullito de Alelí” is originally a *danzonete* (fast *danzón* with vocal text), its opening rhythmic motif duplicates the *danzón baqueteo*: [X0xx 0xx0]. By shifting the downbeat to the *clave*’s 2-side, “Capullito de Alelí” essentially switches genre, from *canzonete* to *guaracha*.

This example demonstrates how closely *clave* orientation, melodic/harmonic periodicity, and genre are intertwined. The shifting of the fifth pulse of *danzón cinquillo* *clave* can turn *danzonete* to *guaracha*.

This *clave* counterpoint, where both sides of the *clave* are accentuated by different instruments or voices, takes place both at the performative and arranging levels. Latin music arrangers are known for their ability to shift or “flip” the *clave* direction while maintaining strict 3-side/2-side alternation. Especially stellar examples can be found in Rafael Ithier’s arrangements for “El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico.” In songs such as “Azuquita pal Café” or “No Hago Mas na’,” verses, bridges, interludes, and *mambos* switch *clave* direction logically and seamlessly, without once breaking the *clave* alternation.

In light of the “great *clave* shift,” *timba*’s metrical accentuation and periodicity need not be understood as being contra-*clave*, even though most sectional divisions place downbeats on the *clave*’s 2-side. Piano *tumbaos* further complicate *timba*’s structures by

combining contra-*clave* with metrical displacement and superimposed non-binary patterns lasting 3, 5 or 7 N-cycles.⁶⁰

Notation and Metricity

When notating Cuban/Latin popular music arrangements, metrical grids, cyclical lengths and average periodicities are all taken into account. In the United States and Latin-America, the *clave* cycle takes up two measures with the eighth note as its N-cycle. This convention made syncopated Latin rhythms easier for jazz musicians to read when playing in big bands. While eighth-note N-cycle notation clarifies isochronous *clave* neutral patterns, it obscures what many musicians consider the *clave*'s proper cyclical representation. In Cuba, *clave*-based music is notated in 2/4 or 4/4, where the entire *clave* takes up a single measure, with the sixteenth note as N-cycle. While this notation more accurately represents how most Cubans feel *clave* in measures, it introduces more perceptible syncopation to *clave* neutral layers. Most *timba* musicians are entirely musically literate, yet they intentionally ignore the metrical implications of *timba*'s notational conventions, viewing them as mere performance coordination guides. Furthermore, many of *timba*'s most metrically intricate features remain unnotated, worked out in daily rehearsals or even onstage.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Justin London, *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 68. The N-cycle is the smallest common metrical value between cross-rhythms. In most *timba*, the N-cycle is the sixteenth note.

⁶¹ Denis "Papacho" Savón with Issac Delgado: personal communication with author, 2009.

Cuban *timba* musicians and fans, like their historical predecessors, thus embody Justin London's "many meters" hypothesis.⁶² For London, listeners familiar with many musical genres hone their senses of normativity and deviation in accordance with each genre's micro- and macrometers, isochronous and non-isochronous patterns, cross-rhythms, polyrhythms, and syncopations. *Timba* fans and musicians recognize the music's historical stylistic roots in Cuban folkloric and popular genres such as *guaguancó*, *son*, *son-montuno*, *danzón*, *mambo*, *pilón*, *songo* and *salsa*. International Latin American genres such as *merengue*, *bomba*, *bossa nova*, *samba*, *cumbia*, and *reggaeton* likewise provide melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic raw material for musical memory and commonality. Any *timba* song or section thereof can combine, to varying extents, melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic patterns and improvisatory schemes drawn from the aforementioned genres. *Timberos*, simultaneously entraining to the *clave* pattern, multiple-*clave* cycles, smaller *clave*-neutral and odd-metered cross rhythms, can switch among these metrical perceptions within sections of the same song, depending on which musical elements demand auditory focus. Fans, dancers, and musicians differently perceive *timba*'s multiplicity of perceptual auditory demands. Shifts in focus from the percussion, bass, vocals, horns or piano in a *timba* experience imbue it with different emotional intensities and empirical complexities.

⁶² London, *Hearing*, 142-168.

Reflections

In this chapter, I have argued the case for Cuban *clave* as an analytical framework for West African traditional musics. I then have enumerated some of the metrical, cadential and semantic issues pertaining to the *clave* in Cuban music itself. There are clear parallels between West African drum ensemble organization schemas and Afro-Cuban folkloric drum ensembles. There are also intriguing *clave*-oriented parallels between the Senegambian Mande *kora* tradition and Cuban *son*. The Cuban concept of *clave* most likely emanates from various West African musical sources including time line patterns and accentuation schemes. Collective ideas regarding various representations of asymmetrical binary cycles, whether in duple or triple meters, have coalesced into the *clave* concept, which took hold in Cuba, got a Spanish name and had its principles codified into Western musical terminology aligning it with such theoretical concepts as measure, syncopation, downbeat, and tonal center. As Cuban *clave*-based folkloric and popular genres have spread to other parts of Latin-America, Europe and the United States, the *clave* concept has become one of Cuban music's most readily identifiable features. In many musical situations, it need only be invoked to evoke a discernably Cuban flavor. However, the *clave* is but one ingredient in a rich polyrhythmic matrix that can vary widely among genres and be overtly sounded or left silent and implicit. I contend that the essential characteristic of the Cuban *clave* is in fact not inherently Cuban after all, but rather African, as African as any other broad

generalizations that scholars have made about musical structures, common aesthetics, or intersecting genres.

Ethnomusicology and rhythm and meter scholars describe West African musical and structural phenomena in terms of Western theoretical concepts such as time line, density referent, or gross pulse. New terms are constantly being coined to explain what pre-existing Western ones cannot. It therefore seems entirely just to offer up the Cuban *clave* as an ingenious analytical tool for understanding what goes on in much West African traditional and popular music. The *clave* concept comes with a clear metric position and can be easily notated in 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/8, or 12/8 time signatures. Since the concept is not attached to specific rhythmic patterns, it can be applied to a number of traditions where either a time line pattern and/or the proper accentuation scheme is present. The *clave* concept offers Western students an easy way of situating patterns against the *clave*, finding the downbeat and easily executing polyrhythms or syncopations against it.

It is therefore my hope that this *clave* case study may excite even one frustrated West African master musician with a Spanish term from Cuba that he can use during a trying moment as he attempts to bridge many cultural chasms and make the timeless time line bell go off in an eager student's head and heart, uniting body and brain with the hidden rhythm.

Chapter 4

A Parametric Paradigm for Afro-Diasporic Music Analysis: Vocabularies, Repertories, and Abstract Procedures

Introduction: Lost and Found In Translation

I live in a world where sounds and silences are signs, where the "writing" is usually on the tongue rather than the wall. A pre-dawn plethora of singing birds means the sun will come out soon. The bubbling of bitter coffee in a stove-top espresso maker means that *café con leche* is on its way. The ascending pitch of dripping water lets me know when my thermos is getting full. The whoosh and slush of passing cars means it has rained. Synthesized speech on my desktop means Windows has booted successfully; TalkBack on an Android smartphone means the phone is on. Acoustic changes in air reflections mean I'm passing tall trees or imposing buildings. A simple concrete wall at ear level can keep me walking a straight line.

All these sounds have proven to be reliable harbingers of the objects or activities I've learned to associate with them. But anyone missing a sense eventually realizes that he must function in a world of metaphors, similes, and analogues, all based on presumed equivalences. In high school, an art historian substitute teacher, intent on teaching me colors, described blue as "cool tile," because her sight had produced an unspoken analogue between cool tile and the color blue. But half of that presumed analogue has never existed in my conceptual mind or sensory world: I having never experienced the

physical sensation of pigmented light hitting my eyes. Nonetheless, metaphors, similes, and analogies, integral to everyday speech and a myriad writing genres, use linguistic vocabulary to “translate” between the concrete and conceptual.

As a semantic and syntactical system, music likewise traffics in sounds as signs. No musical feature categorically corresponds to emotions such as happiness or sadness; yet, people often speak of music’s emotional power, a power that resides in the meanings cultures ascribe to sounds. If there are any musical universals, they reside in cross-cultural equivalences including timbres, scales, and rhythmic cells. In the universal or culturally comparative sense, many musical features can be objectively quantified. Whether the Western mathematical system of frequency measurement is emic or etic to a musical system, A440 will not be called G236. Similarly, a rhythmic cycle of three beats in one culture will not be conceptualized as having thirteen beats in another. But beyond these “objective” cross-cultural universals, every musical gesture derives its semantic meaning from its parent culture’s aesthetics and values.

Every musical system therefore depends on some sort of verbal or nonverbal conceptual apparatus that ascribes culturally-based meanings to seemingly arbitrary sounds. With notated music, the pictographic representations of pitches and durations embodies a vital part of the conceptual apparatus. But for aural/oral musical systems, the conceptual apparatus may reside in a culturally collective historicity or individual musicians’ archival memories.

The ability to conceptualize a music system's patterns and rules enables the Western classical "historically informed performance" movement to extrapolate ancient sounds and performance practices from notated compositions and extant treatises. It enables Dixieland jazz revival ensembles to extrapolate improvisation matrices from scratchy historical recordings made by long deceased musicians. Within the Cuban/Latin context, a well developed conceptual apparatus enabled 1960s New York percussionists to learn the *Lukumí batá* repertoire from historical recordings and Fernando Ortiz's published transcriptions. It has also facilitated more contemporary Cuban genres such as *songo* and *timba* achieving a transnational, transcultural presence in places where these genres' performance practices have to be consciously cultivated.

These and very many other examples of trans-temporal, transcultural musical intelligibility and even fluency are all based upon a fundamental premise: in order to process what we hear, we require, at the very least, a conceptual framework in which the new and foreign can be related in some way to the familiar. Ethnomusicology and music theory posit such cross-translations all the time. The very act of documenting a culture's musical practices in a language foreign to that culture is an attempt to render its musical practices in terms of practices familiar to Western musicians and scholars. This cross-cultural intelligibility often requires immense conceptual libraries necessary for the interrelation of musical concepts. When this translation is successful, the analytical paradigm reveals and clarifies seemingly random musical choices into predictable patterns—for example, a Western classical composer's preferred chords, a jazz

improviser's motivic repertoire, or an Indian percussionist's variation and development schema. Cross-cultural analysis works best when certain musical premises are universally understood to be true. But what happens when a musical system's most important features are not cross-culturally recognizable as near universals? Cross-cultural musical translations take over. *Raga* is conceptualized as mode with ascending/descending rules. *Montuno* is relatable as ostinato. Motivic improvisations over repeating patterns becomes theme and variation. Rather than insist on purely emic musical conceptualizations or assume the stance that my subject matter requires etic terminology and analysis techniques, my focus is on intelligibility. I therefore freely borrow analogic vocabulary from the various musical systems I've studied in order to clarify many of the most baffling phenomena in Cuban/Latin popular music.

All that said, there are dangers in constructing the logocentric libraries necessary to understand very "exotic" musical systems from around the world. While cross-cultural and interdisciplinary analysis inherently requires some measure of conceptual translation, it is condescending to assume that non-Western cultures and musical systems require etic terms and concepts to be grafted on to them, lest they appeared devoid of logocentric epistemologies and analytical pattern paradigms. However, as today's scholars have clarified, the apparent lack of emic words for musical ideas is often deceptively false. In truth, the words for musical ideas may be closed to certain participants, depending on their insider/outsider cultural status, class, race, or perceived level of dedication. In some cultures, certain musical ideas are considered to be so inherent and apparent that they are

presumed rather than explicitly verbalized. I have interviewed and made music with Cuban and Latin musicians who are comfortable verbalizing concepts such as cadence, *clave* alignment, syncopation, and cross-rhythm. I have also learned priceless musical lessons from people whose only hope for conceptual explication is musical demonstration. In my field research, Spanish fluency has always been advantageous, obviating the need for 1:1 correspondences in literal or creative idiomatic translation.

This work, however, seeks to erode rather than bolster the tangles of cross-cultural musical translation by straddling the emic/etic chasm. Simply summarized, emic terms are verbalized within a studied culture, while etic terms are used predominantly by scholars from other cultures to describe and analyze the studied culture's values, aesthetics, and practices. However, in the Cuban/Latin context, the emic/etic line is murky at best. Within the popular music ensemble, the inherited vocabularies of melodic and harmonic instruments often draw upon the legacies of Western classical theory and notation. Some Spanish terms such as *acorde* (chord), *melodía* (melody), *harmonía* (harmony), *ritmo* (rhythm) or *escala* (scale), are so closely related to English cognates that they barely require translation. Other terms, such as *compass* can mean beat, pulse, or measure. *Polyrítmia* can mean polymeter, alternate rhythmic proportion, or cross-rhythm. Still other musical terms, such as *soneo* (lead vocal improvisation), *guía* (precomposed lead vocal phrase), *estribillo* (refrain), *montuno* (repeating harmonic progression), or *mambo* (precomposed repeating figure played between vocal improvisation sections), often depend on glossaries and footnotes for intelligibility.

Moreover, all the above Spanish terms refer to musical sections rather than abstract procedures as such.

Frames, Scripts, Hierarchies, Semantic Nets, and Models

Some abstract concepts such as *clave* alignment, cadence, and cross-rhythm can be analyzed using what Catherine Burnette Chamblee (2008) calls “frames, scripts, hierarchies, semantic nets, and models involving rules.”⁶³ This chapter sets forth an analytical frame in which musical systems in general and Cuban/Latin popular musics can be parametrically analyzed. The frame of vocabularies, repertoires and abstract procedures allows the precise pinpointing of which elements change or remain static, which changes are allowed or forbidden and which musical performance “scripts” carry sufficient syntactical meaning to be instantly understood. This semantic intelligibility is what Chamblee (2008) calls “semantic nets.”⁶⁴

Applying Chamblee’s analytical frame to *son montuno* piano, we immediately hear a registrally hierarchical relationship between bass, piano, rhythm guitar, *tres*, and trumpets. Another hierarchy is present between the *tumbadora* (low conga), *bongó*, *maracas*, and *clave*. This is especially during *montuno* sections, where the piano tends to occupy the keyboard’s mid to low register in order to accommodate the *tres* and trumpets, all of which occupy a higher registral range. The song-specific *bajo cantado* (singing bass) lines and *montunos* precomposed in *son montuno* and the textures used to

⁶³ Chamblee, “Cognitive Processes,” 167.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

realize them are stylistic models or prototypes for subsequent creations. The *son clave* provides a powerful semantic net in which stress and cadence are clearly defined. Sometimes, the *coro* outlines the *clave*'s tresillo (or 3-side) by accenting its pulses and corresponding them to Spanish syllabic *stress*. Other times, a *coro* or *guajeo* may culminate on beat 1&, with the *clave* taking up a full 4/4 measure. This outlines the *clave*'s 2-side by again accentuating the pattern's fourth pulse.

Chamblee (2008) stresses the importance of musical scripts or procedural instructions in pipe organ and gospel organ improvisation.⁶⁵ The improviser is cognitively categorizing sets of small procedures into improvisation routines. This may be likened to subs in computer programming—events triggered when certain conditions are met. I first realized the power of musical scripts when studying in jazz pianist/educator Barry Harris' improvisation classes. In addition to singing lines that students were expected to pick up by ear, Barry might instead provide procedural instructions such as: "Run C7 down from the upper tonic down to the second, with a halfstep between tonic and seventh; then, instead of C-7's tonic, play the third of A-7 and do a pivot diminished on that C-sharp."⁶⁶

In *timba tumbaos*, the pianist clearly works with a mental script, categorizing variation types and placing them in a loose order for use over each *tumbao*. This script could say, "First, state the original *tumbao* twice without variations. Second, apply duple and/or triple rhythmic displacements to the *tumbao*'s antecedent phrase, then to its

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 109-111.

consequence phrase. Third, insert a variation in the consequent phrase on the *clave*'s 2-side using double thirds. Fourth, use a different texture to vary the consequent phrase than that found in the antecedent phrase.”

Many times, when learning from or playing music with master musicians, a simple “*haz lo así*” (“do it this way”) accompanied by an exemplary demonstration, often convey more than vast verbiage specifying a dozen exceptions to every rule ever could. In that sense, the musical demonstration is the embodiment of a frame, script, semantic net, and model working together to maintain a tradition while indicating in which exact areas that tradition can withstand creative innovations.

In an effort to penetrate Cuban/Latin music's structural underpinnings more deeply than the average superficial level, this chapter presents an analytical framework of three semantic musical levels upon which stasis and various kinds of change can be tracked: vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures. Cuban/Latin popular music's “rules” governing musical concepts such as: literal and varied repetition, conversation simulation, rhythmic, and harmonic rotational equivalences, can be effectively understood and analyzed by focusing in on any of the three levels or taking them together. In the next chapter, I apply this analytical framework to a nuanced discussion of the Cuban *clave* pattern's musical implications for melody, harmony, rhythm, and organizational structure. The *clave* is at once a sound: either wooden sticks or a drum stick on a jam block. Its single sound constitutes its most basic vocabulary. Since all *clave* patterns in Cuban folkloric and popular musics are variations or rotations of one

another, the *clave* corpus, tiny and static as it may be, constitutes a repertoire. Most important, though, the *clave*'s implicit rules regarding cyclicity, stress, and cadence are chiefly understood by Cuban and Latin musicians as abstract procedures to be applied to real world music.

Three Parametric Levels: Vocabularies, Repertories, and Abstract Procedures

Thus far, we have seen that Cuban/Latin popular musics span a continuum from static parts to dynamically changing schemas of themes and improvised variations. This process of gestural/textural augmentation of preexisting rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic patterns straddles a continuum between cultural functionality and abstract creativity. During all the processes involved in these sonic transformations, musical raw material is borrowed and repurposed on the different analytical parametric levels outlined below. This raw material can be likened to language's phonemes, morphemes, alphabets, and words. As musical vocabularies become codified into repertories and abstracted into procedures, they become the syntactical equivalents of ideas, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Although musical and lexical units rarely correspond one to one, both derive their significance from intelligibility. Every aesthetic trait prized in Cuban/Latin popular music, from good taste and sound judgement to grounding in tradition and creative innovation, ultimately breaks down to the musician's assimilation of these three parametric levels: vocabularies, abstract procedures, and repertories. Analyzed individually or collectively, these broad categories bring different elements into focus. To

understand how these three parametric organizational levels apply to Cuban popular music and Latin piano in particular, we must first deal with the myriad ways of measuring musical units, for knowing which units change or remain the same is the cornerstone of this parametric paradigm.

Measuring the Musical Unit

As an Afro-Diasporic musical system, Cuban music is often described, even by musicians themselves, as being polyrhythmic. In his 2003 monograph *Representing African Music*, Kofi Agawu discusses “polymeter and other myths” as being hyperbolic exoticisms intended to perpetuate Western perceptions of African rhythm as being impenetrably polyrhythmic.⁶⁷ Most Cuban and Latin musicians working in the West have expressed similar frustrations with how our music is perceived. These perceptions often further mystify rather than clarify our music, particularly in terms of rhythm/meter, *clave*, syncopation and “feel” (swing). Much of this confusion actually concerns the musical unit on melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic levels. Like many African and Afro-Diasporic musics, musical units of different sizes and scopes often operate simultaneously, creating a counterpoint both of cyclical durations, timbres, and harmonic progressions.

Most of the “static” instruments discussed in the previous chapter: *claves*, *catá*, *guiro*, *maracas*, *cascara*, and various handbells, work with only three, two, or even one

⁶⁷ Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 71-96.

sound, and play at most half a dozen patterns. Thus, the *clave* or *cascara* patterns can be quantified in terms of their sounded and silent pulses as musical units. The Cuban *son* and *rumba claves* contain five sounded pulses (rhythmic units) and eleven silent pulses, constituting five unit sizes, given here from smallest to largest: (1) the five sounded pulses, (2) the eleven silent pulses, (3) the *tresillo* (3-side) asymmetrical half, (4) the *gimagua* (2-side) asymmetrical division and finally (5) the entire *clave* pattern. Yet, in sounding these five musical units, the physical *claves* (wooden sticks) can only produce one sound, which is for that instrument, the only timbral unit. The *guiro*, for another example, can produce only two similar sounds: the short scratch and the long scrape, played by dragging the stick up and down the *guiro*'s ridged surface. When we say that the typical *guiro* pattern is only a quarter *clave* in length, we are in fact comparing five unit sizes: 1) the short scratch, (2) the long scrape, (3) the pattern's sounded and silent pulses as the smallest unit, (4) the entire pattern as the mid-sized unit, and (5) the *clave* as the largest unit.

Similarly, the *campana* (*bongosero*'s handbell) can produce three timbral units: the mouth tone, the muffled heel tone and the open heel tone, used mostly for *repiques* (fills) and *llamados* (calls). Consider the 3-2-*clave* campana pattern notated in ASCII text, with M for the bell's large mouth and H for the bell's smaller heel: [M○HH M○HH M○H○ M○HH]. The spaces between phrases demarcate each beat of the 4/4 measure. Thus, we see that the *campaneo* pattern contains three iterations of the first phrase outlining the *clave*'s 3-side, and a variant phrase outlining the *clave*'s 2-side in the

scheme AABA. If we frame the *campaneo* pattern in terms of two musical units corresponding to the *clave*'s halves, we easily understand the practice of repeating only the first musical unit on both sides of the *clave*. This *campaneo* pattern is thus clavecized from a half-*clave* pattern to a full-*clave* pattern by adding a variant unit. In Chapter 6, I analyze the clavecization of the *nengón* motif across many Cuban popular music genres. Like the *claves*, the *contracampana* pattern played on the “mambo bell” by the *timbalero* uses only one timbral unit, an unpitched metallic high frequency ring. Yet, its pattern also contains four units in AABA form: [XOXO XXXX OXXX XOXX].

The typical *conga marcha* (or *tumbao*) can be measured in many unit groups. First, there are all the individual drum strokes: palm, tip, slap and open tone, to which *ahogados* (muffled tones) can be added as variations. Taken in larger groups, the palm and tip constitute a unit of one beat in eighth notes or half a beat in sixteenths. The slap tip is the same sized unit, while the *marcha*'s final two open tones are the final unit of that same size. Consider the *conga marcha* notated in ASCII text, using O for open tone, P for palm, T for tip and S for slap: [PTST PTOO]. Since this pattern only lasts half a *clave*, the *clave* cycle is often completed by a variant in which only one final open tone is used, falling on the aforementioned *bombo* (3-side third pulse, beat 4 or 2&). In order to elongate the *conga marcha* to an entire *clave* and then to two, four or eight *clave* cycles, two basic strategies are used involving timbral and rhythmic variations. Rhythmically, the right-left pattern is altered to accommodate syncopated open tones, double slaps, or muted tones. Timbrally, most contemporary Cuban/Latin ensembles use at least two

congas for a modicum of melodic/timbral contrast. *Timba congueros* such as Tomasito Cruz and Alexis Mipa Cuesta strung together these *marcha* variations, creating song-specific patterns lasting two, four and even eight *claves*. These song-specific *marchas* and their variations are documented in a three volume set of books for Mel Bay Publications, co-written by independent scholar Kevin Moore and this author.⁶⁸

Turning to harmonic instruments, we see that on the smallest unit level, the bass or piano's timbres are only distinguish by pitch frequency. One of *timba* bass's gesture/texture expansions has been the addition of string pulls, snaps, slides, and thumps, popularized by bassists such as Feliciano Arango, Alain Pérez and Yoel Domínguez. But whereas Cuban dancers and listeners have welcomed the bass's increased timbral vocabulary, pianists have not attempted to enlarge the piano's smallest timbral unit. Playing each *tumbao*'s pitch with different physical keyboard instruments or synthesizer patches on the same keyboard is impractical because both hands are always occupied with the *tumbao*. This has meant that the pianist's choice to play the same phrases in one or both hands, or to use octaves, thirds, sixths, tenths, or single-note melodic decorations corresponds to the percussionist's timbral palette.

⁶⁸ Kevin Moore, Orlando Fiol, Tomas Cruz, and Mike Gerald, *The Tomas Cruz Conga Method* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2004).

Rhythmic Units and Cross-Rhythms

Many times, I have observed a curious phenomenon: a Cuban Latin musician, usually a percussionist, teaches a cross-rhythm phrase such as [oXoX XooX oXXo oXoX XooX] by counting “1 2 3” at the next highest metrical level from the cross-rhythm’s N-cycle (or density referent). The counting of “1 2 3” over [oXoX XooX] suggest that the cross-rhythm itself is being considered as its own repeating rhythmic unit *moreso* than the duple measure in which it is played. Often, when listening to Arsenio Rodríguez’s *diablo* sections for the first time, I have heard many three-beat cross-rhythm breaks begin and waited suspensefully to hear how they would be resolved both against the duple meter and the *clave* direction.⁶⁹ Similar prolonged cross-rhythm “suspense” occurs in *changüí* or *rumba*, where the *bongo de monte* or *quinto*, both fulfilling lead drum roles, execute complex odd-numbered cross-rhythms, resolving them both to the prevailing duple meter and *clave* direction either by repeating the cross-rhythm until it realigns with *tactus* and *clave*, or more interestingly, choosing an arbitrary metrical point at which to terminate the cross-rhythm phrase with a cadential phrase. This common lead drum technique, stemming from West African practices, is likewise imitated in the piano solo, usually using low-register chords to correspond to a drum’s open or muted tones, and higher-register chords corresponding to slap sounds or high-pitched drums such as the *macho* (smaller *bongó* head). Being a well rounded Latin percussionist, I have been

⁶⁹ David García, “Arsenio Rodríguez: A Black Cuban Musician in the Dance Music Milieus of Havana, New York City, and Los Angeles,” (Ph.D. thesis, City University of New York, 2003), 163-189.

able to apply the exact cross-rhythm phrases I would use on *bongó* or *quinto* to my piano solos.

These suspenseful cross-rhythms, often counted by musicians in terms of their duration rather than the prevailing duple meter, thus constitute a counterpoint of rhythmic units. First, there are the cross-rhythm's sounded pulses; second, its unsounded pulses; third, the cross-rhythm duration; fourth, the superimposition cyclical length of the cross-rhythm against the duple measure; fifth, the cyclical length of cross-rhythms required to resolve cadentially to the *clave* direction. Any of these rhythmic units can be lengthened or shortened, provided the musician knows how to compensate for these changes. For instance, a longer or shorter rest between cross-rhythm repetitions decreases the rest as a rhythmic unit. Displacement or rotation of the cross-rhythm's starting pulse can likewise lengthen the repetitions required to resolve the cross-rhythm both to duple meter and *clave* direction.

It is thus very analytically useful to bear in mind the different levels of musical units embodied in the simplest of repeating patterns or improvised phrases, since any miscalculation of these unit sizes can result in mathematical miscalculations affecting cadence and resolution. When I would accompany Barry Harris' vocal students, inserting fancy harmonic substitutions, I would often find myself needing to get to a target chord without enough time for the harmonic substitution to lead to it. At such times, I can still hear Barry whispering to me, standing beside the piano, "You can't get home from

there.” Keeping track of sometimes half a dozen musical unit sizes can mean a safe return “home” or a disaster of pitches and rhythms stranded in the middle of nowhere, waiting to be satisfactorily resolved.

Vocabularies

As the foregoing discussion of musical units demonstrates, the Cuban/Latin instrumentalist’s vocabularies break down into sounds (or timbres), pitches and contours (shapes), harmonic units, rhythmic cells and patterns, melodic motifs, and cadential formulae. In the Cuban popular music system, vocabularies are usually tied to specific instruments and/or genres, are ideally portable, transposable, and adaptable to different contexts. In this sense, the chromatic piano keyboard represents musical mixture in a single instrument. The keyboard organization itself juxtaposes the seven diatonic white keys with the five pentatonic black. Yet, these default configurations apply only to a single transposition. Diatonic scales other than C-major must employ the black keys in order to retain intervallic uniformity. The black and white keys therefore cooperate in the transposition process, which, as we shall later understand, constitutes a large portion of the Cuban/Latin pianist’s skill set.

Like metrical or pattern-based units, vocabulary units can be lexically likened to letters, words, ideas, sentences, or paragraphs, using musical rather than verbal logic to produce convincing stylistic arguments. Every new solo, every varied pattern, every new

song essentially constitutes an argument that the vocabulary elements being strung together work as larger units.

As in many Afro-Diasporic musical systems, Cuban popular music distinguishes between individual and ensemble vocabularies for most instruments, which vary according to ensemble size, type and genre. Thus, a diatonic octave climb on the piano or an arpeggio expressed in triple meter on bass may work well during a call-and-response vocal section or *mambo*, but not when accompanying a flute or *tres* solo. Certain vocabulary phrases may be reserved for solo opportunities where the instrument is showcased, but suppressed during ensemble sections. There is, for instance, the pianistic practice of “calling” in *mambos*, especially after piano solos. This is usually done with diatonic or chromatic octaves in both hands leading up to the beginning of the harmonic progression. However, if these piano calls were inserted during vocal improvisations or percussion solos, they would be interpreted as being stylistically out of place, since they cannot possibly call in *mambos* at those inappropriate sectional junctures.

Thus, with each melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic vocabulary phrase comes a set of rules often longer and more complex than the phrase itself, detailing the circumstances in which that phrase can or should be used. These circumstantial specifications may be linked to genre expectations, tempo, ensemble configuration, tonality/modality or registral contrasts between voices and instruments. Nearly every evolutionary development in Cuban/Latin popular music has dealt primarily with

vocabulary, either introducing new melodic, harmonic or rhythmic possibilities. But each introduction of new raw material intended to amplify existing vocabularies also comes with an inherent logical argument detailing why such gestures or textures can now make sense. These musical “arguments” often take decades of transnational, intergenerational dialogue to be resolved. Within this framework, *salsa* musicians’ resistance to many of Cuban *timba*’s stylistic features, especially piano *tumbaos*, can be interpreted as disputes over proper pianistic vocabulary within our musical tradition.

Repertories

Like musical vocabularies, repertories are identifiable, recognizable, and duplicable. Yet, they are generally larger units than vocabulary elements such as rhythmic cells or melodic gestures. They may be repeating drum patterns, vocal refrains, instrumental ostinati, soloing matrices, etc., with the proviso that the units are usually deployed in their entirety rather than permuted in the manner of vocabulary architecture. Repertories are most easily understood in terms of precomposed pieces of known or unknown origin with recognizable structures as strophes and refrains.

One of the most fascinating linkages between vocabularies and repertories can be found in the rural *changüí* genre (discussed in chapter 6) and a recognized antecedent of *son* and its derivations: *son montuno*, *salsa*, and *timba*. As my subsequent analyses of the *changüí* “El Guararey de Pastora” demonstrate, the *changüí* song, as an entire repertoire

unit, dictates the *tres tumbao* played in unison with the vocal line. *Changuiceros* and scholars such as Benjamin Lapidus trace this practice back to the fact that long before *changüí* was ever filmed or recorded, *treseros* were also singers, their songs and *guajeos* moving in perfect unison, fusing the *tres*'s *montuno* vocabulary with vocal repertory. As discussed in the previous chapter, this practice of *montunos* moving in unison with lead or backing vocals has ultimately meant that vocabularies and repertories in the Cuban/Latin popular music tradition have consistently used the same compositional elements. However, with the arrival of greater *montuno* independence, both with the use of generic arpeggiation patterns and song-specific *tumbaos*, the hitherto inextricably linked vocabularies and repertories have now separated and can frequently make cameo appearances for one another. Thus, a piano or *tres guajeo* from a *son montuno*, in unison with the *coro* refrain, can show up against a different *coro* in a different genre, even over a different harmonic progression. It is thus vital to underscore the “mobility” and interrelations between vocabularies and repertories, both influencing and shaping each other in the service of musical variety and vitality.

Abstract Procedures

Although precomposed ceremonial, secular, and popular songs are considered Cuban music's most identifiable corpus of repertoire, these songs exist independently from the myriad arrangement or “treatment” options grafted on to them according to

genre traditions and conventions. These treatment or arrangement embodies the most abstract level of Cuban musical syntax: abstract procedures. In abstract procedures, musical techniques distilled from Western classical, West African, and Afro-Diasporic traditions are combined and permuted to furnish any type of repertoire with an appropriate treatment, called *vestimenta* (vestment). The Western classical procedures include: orchestration, imitation, counterpoint, repetition, variation, prolongation, suspension, and displacement. They are most often employed in Cuban popular and art musics to contribute harmonic richness. Many of these abstract procedures or treatments are often tied to specific genres.

As previously discussed, the *changüí* complex of genres from Guantánamo generally treats all its songs with the *tres* (double coursed guitar) playing in unison with the vocal melody. The *güiro* (or guayo) scraper, *maracas* and *marímbula* (a plucked bass instrument with metal keys) play their patterns with relatively little elaboration, save for the *marímbula*'s use of triplets within the duple metrical framework. Atop all this, the *bongó del monte* deploys a vocabulary (or repertoire) of syncopated rhythmic phrases (*repiques*) likened to the *quinto*'s role in *rumba*. The *bongó* marking also dialogues with dancers, aligning beats to footwork. These phrases frequently employ cross-rhythms, five-stroke rolls, slaps, rimshots, and the famous *bramido* (often called the “mousse call”).

Thus, in terms of vocabularies and repertoires, *changüí* as a genre contains enough improvisation possibilities to maintain an aesthetic balance between stasis and change. However, in terms of abstract procedures or treatments, *changüí* arrangements differ relatively little between songs, except for tempo, key and mode. Different songs are therefore identified by their repertory-level indicators rather than abstract procedural treatments.

Other traditional Cuban genres, such as *son*, *danzón*, and *guaguancó* likewise apply a specific set of abstract procedures on to different repertoires. In *danzón*, the melodías receive the same treatment of a *cinquillo*-based baqueteo pattern on *güiro* and *timbal*, as well as a characteristic tresillo-based bass pattern. These stock treatments lend every *danzón* automatic recognition as a genre, whether the melody is a Cuban *estribillo* (popular refrain) or an arrangement of themes from a Western classical composition.

Likewise, as scholar and extensive record producer, René López, points out, many of Ignacio Piñeiro's *sones* are in fact adaptations of songs from the *rumba* repertoire that used to be performed by large ambulatory choruses, called *coros de clave*. During my formative years collecting *son* recordings, I was unaware of these *son* adaptations of *rumba* repertoire, since the sextet/septet ensemble's instrumentation bear little resemblance to the *rumba* ensemble.⁷⁰ I had to learn to listen past 1920s-1930s recordings of Sexteto Habanero and Septeto Nacional's usage of *tres tresillo* arpeggios, metronomic

⁷⁰ Stover 2009; Larry Crook, "A Musical Analysis of the Cuban Rumba," *Latin American Research Review* 3 no.1 (1982): 92-123.

maracas, and either the aforementioned *marímbula* or acoustic bass patterns in order to hear the *rumba* influence. The vocal lyrics, melodic figures, and tertian duet harmonizations, as well as the intensely improvised *bongó* style, eventually accustomed me to pinpointing exactly on which levels *son*'s musical mixture was taking place. Its instruments, timbres and nasal vocal delivery came straight out of the aforementioned *Coros de clave* interpreting mostly *yambú* (the slowest *rumba* type) and *columbia*, the fastest and most clearly African type. Its harmonic progressions were often simplified versions of Iberian-derived diatonic moves.

This *son* education helped me make better sense of *salsa* and *timba* arrangements, which employ a large array of abstract treatments during different arrangement sections: chordal accompaniment of vocal verses, *motive*, or *obligado* (bass and piano unison passages), generic and song-specific *tumbaos* (ostinati) during *montuno* (call and response refrain sections), piano solos between sets of call and response vocals, interludes introducing new *montuno* progressions in different keys or modes, bass and percussion gears, horn *mambos*, improvised *moñas*, and so on. Therefore, the pianist's skill set for complete *timba* and jazz arrangements involves the mastery of chordal accompanimental formulae in all keys, generic *son*, *guaracha*, and *chachachá tumbaos*, as well as realizations of written obligados, and, most important to this study, the creation and elaboration of song-specific *tumbaos*.

These examples demonstrate how elements of stylistic vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures are permuted and recombined to meet each genre and song's needs. Based on a song's tonality, legions of melodic and harmonic cadential phrases, bursting with aesthetic implication/realization significance, are brought in to flesh out its treatment.⁷¹ However, as in many other musical systems, repertoires in the Cuban context are flexibly tied to specific genres, permitting multi-genre treatments in various permutations. *Yambús* from *rumbas* became *sones* during the 1920s and 1930s. Instrumental *danzones*, traditional to the *orquesta típica*, acquired lyrics and transformed into *danzonetes*. *Boleros* became *guaguancós* and *changüís* became international *salsa* hits.

Quantifying Musical Mixture

Having differentiated between vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures, musical mixture can now be quantified using various methods of statistical representation, from mental retention to elaborate graphs, tables, and spreadsheets. A given instrument or genre's vocabulary can be broken down to atomic or molecular units of different sizes in order to measure variables such as diatonic or chromatic transposition, rhythmic displacement, rhythmic augmentation and diminution, motivic development, inversion and retrograde, as well as harmonic elaboration and substitution.

⁷¹ Eugene Narmour, *The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Complexity: The Implication-Realization Model* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

The musicologist/analyst can designate specific musical elements pertaining to the broad categories of vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures, depending on the musical system's aesthetic needs. Following this parametric paradigm, each instrument's behaviors can be understood as falling into one of these three broad categories. Musical mixture can then be calculated according to the perceived rate of mixture between differing vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures. Genres therefore represent the codification of different types of vocabulary elements into repertories and abstract procedures. Furthermore, each musical arrangement can be analyzed in terms of the changes occurring on each categorical level, pertaining to each instrument or voice.

For instance, in a *rumba* ensemble, the *clave* and *guagua* patterns are invariably repeating, which means they operate simultaneously as vocabularies and repertories. The *quinto* (lead drum) combines two broad categories of phrases, a basic “ride” during vocal strophes, and a busier soloing matrix during the call and response refrain *montuno* section. Depending on the style of *rumba* (traditional *habanera*, *matancera*, or modern *guarapachangueo*) the supporting drums' vocabularies may consist of calls and conversations introduced either independently or as responses to the *quinto*'s phrases. Meanwhile, the *rumba* singer's repertoire consists of pre-composed *rumba* songs, by known and unknown songwriters, stock verses used as improvisations and numerous refrains, some of which are tied to specific songs, and others that can be freely mixed or matched. Playing all instruments in the *rumba* ensemble and even singing *rumbas*, all these analyses of the music as vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures have

helped me decide which kinds of *quinto* phrases or supporting drum conversation are appropriate for strophes versus *montuno* sections.

Thus, Afro-Cuban and pan-Latin musical genres interrelate not only in terms of vocabularies and repertoires, but also in abstract procedures as conceptual templates for one another. Although *tumbao* and accompaniment pianistic vocabularies may differ markedly between genres, the rules governing their deployment tend to be consistently applied across genres.

Syntax and Grammar in Cuban Popular Music

Thus far, we have defined three parametric levels of musical events and defined vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures. We can now evaluate how these parametric categories shape and are shaped by solo and ensemble roles in various types of Afro-Cuban music.

Afro-Cuban Folkloric Ensembles, Timbral Vocabularies, and Ensemble Roles

Like many other popular music traditions around the world, Cuban music draws many of its timbral, melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features from its various folkloric traditions, from secular *rumba* and *carnival comparsa*, to ceremonial traditions included in Afro-Diasporic spiritual faiths, such as *Lukumí*, *Palo*, and *Abacuá*. Although the double-headed *batá* drums are designed and played differently from Yuka or Makuta log

drums, and although their repertory corpi contain different amounts of material, many of the individual timbres in various Cuban folkloric traditions outline a set of lexical values. For instance, many Cuban folkloric sacred ensemble types, like their West African progenitors, consist of hand drums and hand bells. These include Palo Congo, Ararará Dahomeyano, and Iyesá. In all these ensemble types, there is a lead drum, two or more supporting drums, and at least a hand bell to maintain the time line pattern (see Chapter 2). There are also Cuban folkloric secular ensemble types with hand drums and sticks instead of bells: *tumba francesa* and *rumba*. In these ensemble types, the lead drum is the highest in pitch and smallest in size, while the lower two or three drums fulfill supporting roles with patterns and minor variations. Finally, there is the *Lukumí batá* battery discussed above, consisting of three hourglass-shaped double-headed drums and, in *matanzas*, a small rattle called *acheré*. In the *batá* battery, the highest and smallest *Okónkolo* maintains simple patterns with minor variations, while the lead drum (*iyá*) and the responding drum (*itótele* engage in melodic and alternating conversations).⁷²

These folkloric ensemble types are not mere organology taxonomies; they also serve as precursors to, or prototypes for, popular music ensembles, of which the piano is an integral part. Like folkloric ensemble types, popular ensembles contain instruments

⁷² For an in-depth organological classification of the Afro-Cuban *batá* drums and other folkloric drums, see Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos de la Música Afrocubana (1952-1955)*, Volume IV (1954): *Los Membranófonos Abiertos, los Bimembranófonos y Otros Tambores Especiales* (Música Mundana Maqueda: Madrid, 1955).

playing static patterns, instruments engaged in conversations, instruments providing harmonic support, and vocals providing both precomposed and improvised texts.

Stasis and Change

Since so many Afro-Diasporic musical systems are steeped in micro- and macro-cycles, many of its aesthetic principles center around the key questions: From this moment to the next, should something change or stay the same? If change, what kind, how much and how fast? If staying the same, how many times or for how long? Cuban folkloric and popular musics particularly attend to the sonic qualities that imply cyclicity versus narrativity as axes along which musical behaviors are situated and evaluated.

How then are the parameters of stasis and change manipulated within the Cuban/Latin musical system? Let us first consider the instruments in proto-Latin music ensembles whose roles involve almost no change: the *claves*, *maracas*, and *guiro*.

The *clave* pattern, whether played on *las claves* (two wooden sticks) or a *caja china* (jam block), neither reacts nor changes sectionally. The only exception to this rule is the frequent practice in *timba* bands of switching between *son* and *rumba claves*. The *claves*'s vocabulary therefore consists of a single idiophonic timbre and six interrelated asymmetrical "time line" patterns.⁷³

⁷³ For an in-depth organological classification of the Cuban *claves* and other percussive sticks, see Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos de la Música Afrocubana (1952-1955)*, Volume 1 (1952): *Los instrumentos anatómicos y Los palos percutivos* ((Música Mundana Maqueda: Madrid, 1955).

The maracas play a pattern of steady eighth notes or sixteenths (depending on the desired duration level for the tactus), ornamented with a “spin”. Many *maraqueros* place this spin on the second pulse following the downbeat (1& or 1e), rapidly flicking the wrist and shaking the *maracas*’ seeds to produce a flourish or roll. My father places his *maraca* spin in a specific relationship to the *clave*, providing a subtle reminder of the *clave*’s cyclicity.

The *guiro* (gourd scraper played with a thin stick) may switch between five stock patterns depending on genre or arrangement section. The most common pattern is the *raspado*, [X0xx x0xx], where the accented boundaries actually consist of both downward and upward strokes with the stick. During *canto* sections, piano and trumpet solos, the *guiro* may switch to the *cascara* (skin or shell) pattern: [X0x0 xx0x X0xx 0x0x]. This is a *clave*-aligned pattern whose halves are switched depending on the *clave* orientation. The coupling of the *cascara* with pattern with *bongo* and *razpado* with *campana* (cowbell) provides an excellent sectional contrast. Many *típico* (traditional) New York *conjuntos* such as Pacheco y su Tumbao Añejo, Conjunto Clásico, Grupo Facinación, and my father’s Orquesta Corazón employ this “gear” scheme. When “tightly locked,” both these gears are wonderful grooves for piano solos.

For faster tempi, the *guiro* may play the *macheteo* pattern: [X00x x00x X0x0 x000]. This is also a *clave*-aligned pattern, with the isochronous pulses sounded against the *clave*’s 2-side. Moving to the hand percussion of *congas*, *bongo*, and *timbales*, we begin to hear both literal repetition and very prescribed variations called *marcaje*

(marking). This term comes from the practice in *rumba* of the *quinto* player marking the dancer's steps, which is also found in West African *jembe* ensembles and Puerto Rican *bomba*, among others. If the genre being played is *son montuno* or *charanga*, the basic *conga tumbao* is played using only one low-mid-pitched drum (*tumbadora*).

In more modern genres such as *salsa*, *songo*, and *timba*, two or more *congas* are often used, in which case the *tumbao* can be extensively varied with melodic phrases using the open tones and mute strokes on all the *congas*. This practice of varying rather than repeating the *conga tumbao*, or *marcha* reaches its zenith during the late 1990s by *timba congueros* Tomasito Cruz and Mipa Cuesta. Like the *conga*, the *bongó* marks within its basic *martillo* (hammer) pattern unite very specific *clave*-aligned phrases, called *repiques*, with open tones on the high and low drums. This *bongó* marking style can be heard in rural *changüí*, traditional *son*, *son montuno*, *mambo*, *guaracha* and *salsa*, although the marking phrases are different depending on the genre. When not marking the *martillo*, the *bongosero* switches to the *campana*, a handbell usually spanning the pitch range of G4 to D5. The *campana*'s added volume balances out the rhythm section vis-à-vis the harmonic instruments, brass and vocals.

In *timba* bands such as Los Van Van and Manolito y su Trabuco, a *bongosero* is not used in live performance, although the *bongo* parts are often overdubbed on studio recordings. Instead, the *timbalero*, augmenting his *timbales* with drumkit, marks the *cascara/clave* groove with rudiment-based fills during verse sections. Although *salsa* has largely remained close to the traditional percussion patterns outlined above, *timba* tends

to introduce new rhythmic patterns, vary existing ones and insert frequent breaks (*bloques* or *efectos*) to break up the monotony. Many *timba* musicians have told me that part of the piano's enhanced gestural/textural vocabulary has been inspired by this free or interactive percussion approach.

Sectional Changes

Most Cuban popular music Genres employ a basic form analogous to the verse and chorus in Western popular music.⁷⁴ Except that the Cuban *montuno* section is much more than a recurring refrain. The refrain is usually sung in harmony by the *coro* (vocal chorus) or sometimes by the brass section. Beneath the actual refrain is a harmonic progression, usually outlined by piano and bass. By the early 1940s, many emerging Cuban *conjuntos* had replaced the *tres* (a guitar-like instrument with three sets of doubled strings tuned in octaves and unison) with the piano, since its pitch range far exceeds that of the *tres* and can sound a wide range of diatonic and chromatic harmonies.⁷⁵ Some *conjuntos*, such as those of Arsenio Rodríguez and René Álvarez, employed four harmonic instruments: *tres*, strummed guitar, piano, and bass. Working with my father, I frequently played piano *guajeos* in the low-mid register in order to contrast registrally and timbrally with the aforementioned *tres* or Puerto Rican *cuatro* (a similar instrument to the Cuban *tres* containing five sets of double strings also tuned in octaves and unisons).

⁷⁴ Perna, *Timba*, 98-118.

⁷⁵ Hill, "Conjunto Piano," 67-97.

Verse: *Largo* or *Canto*

Of the prototypical Cuban popular song form, the verse (called *canto* or *largo*) provides the greatest amount of melodic and harmonic narrativity, since it consists of strophic sung text using various rhyming schemes and an accompanying harmonization. As García and Hill point out, the piano's role during the verse or largo section was primarily decorative.⁷⁶ *Guajeos* or *tumbaos* were rarely played, as pianists instead voiced and arpeggiated chords, as well as decorated chords with ascending/descending runs. Moreover, in an effort to inject more Africanness into his *son montuno* style, Arsenio Rodríguez was one of the first to abandon the largo section, launching directly into the *montuno* from the beginning.

Reflections

Music analysis has always problematized emic versus etic language to describe what is happening, why it happens, and what it means within a given musical system. Since Cuban/Latin musics draw upon various Iberian, West African, and Creole Cuban concepts, the very language musicians use to talk about their aesthetic decisions is a pastiche of terms used in Western art music, jazz, and Afro-Cuban folklore. At rehearsals and recording sessions, I have heard Cuban/Latin musicians using the Cuban names for sectional divisions; specifically, *coro*, *soneo*, or *mambo*. At the same time, I have heard

⁷⁶ García, *Black Cuban Musician*, and *Transnational Flows*; Hill, "Conjunto Piano."

musicians switch verbal registers and indicate a reharmonization using jazz lead sheet shorthand. Although I could barely follow along, I have heard Cuban/Latin musicians refer to rehearsal letters or numbers, as well as fermata or da capo signs, as orchestral players do. In order to indicate the rhythmic structure of a break or preferred soloing style, these same musicians may employ terms for instruments and ensemble roles directly from Afro-Cuban sacred and secular folkloric musics.

Moreover, I have rarely witnessed this kind of verbally hybrid musical banter as a non-participant observer. Understanding what musicians mean by a *moña*, a ii-V-I harmonic progression or a *contratiempo* break has enabled me to work alongside them without feeling lost. However, within the scholarly context, I have tried to craft an analytical language using terms and concepts from Western art music theory and ethnomusicology, as well as select terms from rhythm and meter, computer programming, and cognition/perception theories, all in order to make Cuban/Latin popular music intelligible to cultural and musical outsiders. In addition to the verbally blended interdisciplinary conceptual vocabulary Cuban and Latin musicians use in everyday musical performances, the nature of this work has required another layer of conceptualization in order to translate musical variables and choices from the Cuban/Latin popular music milieu to rarified academic language.

Based on the parametric paradigm presented in this chapter, we see that musical mixture takes place on all three of its levels: vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract

procedures. With our parametric paradigm in place, we can now measure musical units of different sizes and observe the musical mixture process in actual sound. We can actually hear genre vocabularies and repertoires mix and mingle, each acting upon the other. Although vocabularies provide raw musical material in terms of timbre and style, the order and sequence of vocabulary elements matter as much to Cuban/Latin popular music as morpheme and word order matter to language. Repertoires ordering and codifying stylistic materials into specific songs and song-specific parts. However, realizing or treating that repertory involves abstract procedures that in turn call up the same vocabularies as procedural vehicles rather than distinct entities. For instance, when traditional *son* or *son montuno* songs are outfitted with specific parts, breaks, *mambos*, solos, and vocal improvisations, each of these elements are mere theoretical ideas before repertoires give them reasons to exist. In *salsa* and *timba*, the possible treatment or arrangement options have, as we have heard, increased exponentially.

On micro- and macro-pianistic levels, I have learned that it is not enough to memorize favorite licks, deploying them atop any chord where the lick's pitches make sense. It is not enough to break down a *timba tumbao* to its different-sized units and repurpose them in other *tumbaos*. I have had to know why it makes sense to lighten pianistic textures during *muela* sections in *timba*, where the lead singer engages with the audience. I have had to learn why ornate fillagree may be suitable for classic *boleros* but sound "corny" in modern ones. I have had to learn how to tell new band members non-offensively why their soloing style is not using enough signature vocabulary elements to

sound authentic. Most important, I have applied the rules enumerated here to my own self-critical evaluations of musical authenticity in my playing. I can only hope that the parametric paradigm presented here matters to others as much as it does to me.

Chapter 5

The “What If” Moment: Musical Mixture, Individual Artistic Creativity, and Experimentation

I come from Nigeria, Yoruba, Arará (Dahomey) and Karabalí (Calabar),
 Guinea and Congo are my homelands,
 Mozambique and Angola, I'm from there.
 That music that we inherited,
 Sons and grandsons of Africans,
 The ones we mixed with the Spanish, French, or Portuguese
 The one we melded so well with the English,
 That's why we say it's only one.
Timba with *rumba* and rock,
Mambo with *conga* and pop,
Salsa with Mozambique,
 And *clave* from Guanguancó.
Cumbia with jazz and swing,
Songo with *samba* and beat,
 Merengue with *bomba* and *son*,
 And *clave* from Guaguancó.⁷⁷

Introduction

During my tenure in my father's band, I learned how to avoid the typical high-register, octave-laden generic *salsa tumbaos* in favor of his song-specific ones, which often took weeks to seek out and incorporate into the signature ensemble sound. In searching out and creating these song-specific patterns, my father was adamant that his interlocking piano, bass and *tres* parts should not rely on *salsa*'s gestural/textural

⁷⁷ Juan Formell y Los Van Van, *Te Pone La Cabeza Mala* (1997).

menagerie: rather, his New York-style *conjunto* should convey a musical world in which Cuban timbres, textures, gestures, song forms, and arrangement/treatment options provide a base upon which a certain amount of musical mixture subversion could take place. My father's specific combination of what I will term in this chapter musical affinity and musical antipathy are not unique; affinity and antipathy in the Cuban/Latin popular music context often swing like pendular extremes in cyclical waves. During the early 1960s in New York, *salsa* sextets such as Joe Cuba and La Playa intentionally avoided the large reed and brass sections emblematic of big band jazz, preferring a more stripped-down, cool and modern sound. Antipathy toward traditional *charanga* may have steered Los Van Van's Juan Formell, César "pupy" Pedroso and José Luis "Changuito" Quintana to avoid all the traditional *charanga* trappings, replacing the *timbales* with drumkit, the acoustic bass with electric bass, the piano with various electric keyboards.

Even after a near lifetime of performing, teaching, and listening to Afro-Cuban folkloric and popular musics, I am often amazed by the levels of juxtaposition, fusion, and synthesis sounded by vocalists and instrumentalists alike when they perform Afro-Cuban repertoires. I therefore empathize with the many other non-Cuban musicians who wonder how this music works, how its components fit together, what comes from where, and how each element gets blended. I still ask the same questions, both of every Cuban and Latin musician I meet, and more important, from the music itself. What drives this propensity to borrow and blend, meld and fuse, adopt and adapt? Assuming that only the successful experiments reach the public, what goes wrong in the failed experiments?

How do these strange metamorphoses, fusions, and mashups grow legs? What kind of “mad scientist” alchemy guides Cuban and Latin musicians to study their traditional musics with foreign and familiar sounds, distant and local, pitched and unpitched, acoustic and electronic? What gives Cuban and Latin musicians the insight and courage to stretch musical boundaries beyond ceremonial, social, and commercial contexts?

As an alternative to anthropological and ethnomusicological explanations of hybridity as cultural process, this chapter presents a different analytical model appropriate for Afro-Cuban, Latin, and other Afro-Diasporic musical mixtures. The model departs from the hypothesis that before any actual musical mixture can be sonically manifested, it must first exist as an idea in someone’s mind—it is preconceived. That idea must be motivated by attitudes or sentiments toward each of the musical ingredients involved in the proposed mixture. I call these attitudinal motivators *affinity*, *antipathy*, and *necessity*. These attitudinal motivators trigger musically rhetorical processes, such as the hunch that multiple disparate musical ingredients from different traditions actually fit well when layered or juxtaposed. That hunch may be based upon a common timbre, a melodic figure or harmonic progression, a rhythmic groove, feel, or developmental device. Most intriguingly, these hunches may also operate on an abstract level, applying the parametric processes associated with one instrument, style, or genre to an entirely different instrument style or genre.

Whether motivated by timbral, melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic affinities, these musical events may produce one-off experiments or entirely new blended genres.

In the analytical model I propose, I provide general parametric analyses of affinities using the parametric paradigm from the previous chapter: vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures. After giving numerous examples of affinities based on different sounds or sonic organization systems, I explore the role that individual or collective musical imagination plays in turning the affinity-based hunch into an actual sound that people can experience sensually. Shifting my focus away from attitudinal motivators such as affinity, antipathy, and necessity, I propose that a vital part of the Cuban/Latin musician's creative process lies in the "what if" moments where musical Cuban/Latin and Afro-diasporic mixtures are first thought into existence.

By "what if" moments I refer to instances in which musicians make aesthetic and pragmatic decisions to take the music in one or another direction, sometimes successfully, other times unsuccessfully, meaning that the musical renderings are not as good as everyone expects. During various stages of their music making process, Cuban/Latin musicians take calculated risks involving recombinations of timbres, melodic fragments, harmonic progressions, and improvisation matrices interrelate. Each instance of borrowing, blending, fusing, melding, and repurposing realizes what might be termed a "sonic argument." In Cuban/Latin musicians' minds, that argument posits that

this or that musical feature can be selectively fused or mixed with others, either within a specific genre or as a prelude to a new genre's formation.

Theorizing Musical Mixture

Musical mixture and cultural fusion have been intellectual cornerstones for the past half-century, particularly pertaining to non-Western and popular musical systems.

Ingrid Monson argues that

Music, more than any other cultural discourse, has been taken as the ultimate embodiment of African and African diasporic cultural values and as *prima facie* evidence of deep cultural connections among all peoples of African descent. One reason for this perception of the centrality of music surely lies in its ability to coordinate several culturally valued modes of expression, including song, verbal recitation, dance, religious worship, drama, and visual display.⁷⁸

Although African Diasporic music making indeed coordinates several culturally valuable modes of expression, the impetus behind particular musical mixtures cannot always be explained as sociocultural. In AfroCuban and Latin music making, musical mixture is a conscious process that takes place over discreet moments in time, usually beginning with a “what if” moment in which musicians excitedly experiment with a new elemental combination. For example, I have been present as Cuban musicians experiment with backbeats in *rumba*, play *timbal* solos over *batá* rhythms, and interpolate American pop music quotations into *timba coros*. I’m no stranger to the elation of

⁷⁸ Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* (New York: Garland, 2000): 1-3.

hearing a hypothetical idea materialize in actual sound. When these experiments work, they become flashes of insight into the alchemy of musical mixing. Cuban and Latin musicians refer to these seemingly instant explosions with reverence. We say, “The Cuban *conjunto* was never the same after Arsenio incorporated the *tumbadora* and three trumpets,” or “Piano soloing has never been the same since Eddie Palmieri started playing elbow clusters,” or “Cuban popular music has never been the same since the innovations of Los Van Van, Irakere, and NG La Banda.”

Ever since *timba* first appeared in Cuba during the mid-1990s, Cuban and Latin musicians have recognized that the piano’s role in their traditional music has dramatically changed. For Cuban pianist Iván "Melón" Lewis, joining Issac Delgado's band in 1996 did not immediately signal timba's arrival:

OEF: Did you think when you joined Issac's band that you would play *timba*?

IML: Absolutely not. In no instance did I think that. I was lucky in a sense because in that moment of my life, I started working on the project that I liked most compared to everything that was happening at that moment in Cuba. I loved NG! It pulled out of me the most African, the most aggressive, the most fire in me. But I'm not just about those things. I love melody, not more or less than other things, but equally. I love intimacy. At that moment, the band, the project, the music that was nearest to my concept that unified everything, that brought everything together. That concept [of] musical "violence" plus musical beauty, plus diversity of musical genres, the project that brought together all those things best of all was Issac's. I loved Issac's voice; he has a very pleasant voice and mixed many things together. He dared to play *vallenato*, etc. At that time, I loved all that. What Issac and Piloto were doing at the time seemed the most interesting to me because NG already existed; Issac had in fact sung with NG. But then, Issac leaves to put together his own project. Until Issac did that and people got to know his first record, it was NG; it was NG's golden moment. But eventually, your ear

assimilates something and you think "Wow! That's fantastic!" But you know how the Cuban musician is; he doesn't stay there. We keep on and keep on.⁷⁹

Melón's comments highlight the importance of inter-genre musical mixture as a Cuban cultural value, one which has also been claimed by *salseros* around the world. For Melón, there was a sense of Cuban popular music before NG and another sense of that music after Issac Delgado. Though he is modest about his contribution in my opinion, *Melón* was definitely part of that seismic change. Iván Lewis, nicknamed *Melón* (meaning melon) more than any other Cuban pianist during his time, pioneered what would soon become *timba* piano's expanded gestural/textural vocabulary: the use of steady left-hand chord tones as an equivalent to percussion touches and ghost notes, the juxtaposition of multiple gestures/textures in piano *tumbaos*, and the systematic development of melodic motifs through varied repetition. Issac Delgado's band also quickly incorporated the *teclado* (keyboard synthesizer) to provide extended harmonic support and timbrally contrasting *contratumbaos*.

Contextualizing the piano with other rhythm section instruments including bass and percussion, Iván "Meló" Lewis, during our expansive conversations from 2011 to this day, often insists that these gestural/textural vocabulary expansions and applications of abstract procedures were not limited to the piano. *Timba* bass *tumbaos* soon favored the bass' lowest register, using song-specific funky punchy patterns instead of the traditional anticipated bass. During *bomba* or *despelote* sections, bass thumps and slides

⁷⁹ Iván "Melón" González, interview with author, 24 September 2013.

were augmented by the drumkit's backbeat, giving *timba* an aggressive street sound that quickly became synonymous with *cubaneo*. Although it is tempting to view *timba*'s sonic imprints as arising *ex nihilo*, *timba*'s musical mixture processes had their origins in Cuban popular, folkloric, and even art musics. Thus, in order to make sense of the musical motivations spurring *timba*'s rethinking of the Cuban popular music rhythm section, a theorization of musical mixture processes, in keeping with this work's parametric paradigm, proves indispensable to understanding Afro-Cuban music making generally, and *timba* piano performances specifically.

From Affinity to Antipathy

When Cuban/Latin musicians first conceive of a musical mixture and either verbalize it to their colleagues or test it out in actual sound, there is an almost immediate rush to evaluate the mixture's viability. That evaluation may be communicated in an instant, with a big smile, head nod, eye roll, or audible sneer.⁸⁰ These physical gestures of approval or disapproval are momentary snapshots of aesthetic attitudes inserted along the continuum from affinity to antipathy, with necessity as a neutral midpoint. Affinity and antipathy arise as musical materials in which aesthetic values collide. This collision is usually spearheaded by moments of initial encounter. Necessity is what happens because there just is no other viable mechanism.

⁸⁰ Since I cannot see these nonverbal gestures, reliable verbal descriptions have been invaluable to my professional and scholarly fieldwork with Cuban and Latin musicians.

Affinity is the first and perhaps most important step in musical mixture. It is based on musicians' senses of similitude between disparate timbres, gestural/textural vocabularies, rhythmic orientations and abstract parametric procedures. Writing from a cognition/perception perspective, Javier Campos Calvo-Sotelo proposes a sonic affinity based on the musical brain's evolutionary responses to sonic stimuli in the surrounding environment:

The human musical brain is shaped by the action of surrounding sounds, which generate aural profiles and aesthetic patterns in complex reflective processes. The ability to unconsciously internalize auditory signals is the result of an adaptive evolutionary mechanism and develops into a sonic affinity.⁸¹

This cognitive link between environmental and musical sounds is not lost on Cuban and Latin musicians. In chapter 1, I discussed Cuban *tres* virtuoso Pancho Amat's theory regarding the origin of the characteristic syncopated *montunos* common to nearly all genres of Cuban/Latin popular music. For Amat, the trochaic stress of Spanish words such as *oye* (listen) or *mira* (look) served as rhythmic stress templates for *guajeos* and *tumbaos*. This affinity between language and musical stress is also well-documented as it pertains to the Hungarian language's first-syllable stresses and downbeat stresses in Béla Bartók's settings of the peasant folksongs he collected.

Some musicians may think of timbral affinities as the resonance between bird songs and the flute or piccolo. There may be correlations between the rate in which

⁸¹ Juan Campos Calvo-Sotelo, "Sonic Affinity," *Psychology of Music* 44 no.1 (2016): 95.

waves crash on the shore and a genre's average tempo. Similarly, the layered effects of multiple brass, percussion, vocal, piano, and bass vamps in 1940s-1950s *mambo* may have been the result of the urban din of car horns, push carts, street hawkers, and craftspeople plying their trades. I was certainly inspired by all those sounds as signs of daily neighborhood life during both my trips to Havana in 1996 and 2017. Yet, in the Cuban and Latin musical mixture origin stories, such as Juan Formell's "Esto Te Pone la Cabeza Mala," another type of sonic affinity definition may be at play. The sonic affinities between the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and American musical elements fused to form Cuba's folkloric and popular music vocabularies may in fact evince feelings of similitude and substitution, the idea that this sounds like that, or this could substitute for that. Rather than arising out of subconscious aural profiles gleaned from our environment, musical mixtures propose relationships between ostensibly dissimilar musical things based on what I am calling "sonic arguments."

Like verbal arguments, sonic arguments consist of rhetorical gestures proving or disproving phenomena, persuasive pleas advocating an idea, metaphors and analogies expressing the new idea in terms of previously familiar ideas to a given culture. However, whereas in rhetorical arguments, all points are made using language's lexical syntax, sonic arguments are made using sounds. When a Cuban/Latin musician argues for the use of the American backbeat in *rumba*, he/she is making the case for the coexistence of two rhythmic orientations: the West African-derived Cuban *clave* and the alternating backbeat

accentuations found in many American popular musics, from jazz and blues to rock and dance.

In the analytical model that constitutes this chapter's main idea, I argue that affinity, antipathy, and necessity are attitudinal catalysts or motivators for sonic arguments. The *timba* musician who inserts a quotation from R&B or contemporary pop hears such a strong similarity in these two musical elements that they almost beg to be blended. The salsa musicians during the 1960s *boogaloo* era clearly heard an affinity between the bass lines used in Motown and soul music, many recorded by James Jamerson, and the *bajo cantado* (singing bass) coined by Arsenio Rodríguez with his *conjunto* during the 1940s and 1950s. *Boogaloo* thus required the argument of two affinities: bass line similarities and tactus. Unlike the aforementioned Cuban experiments with backbeat in *rumba*, the *boogaloo* depended upon a different temporal affinity between the average tactus in soul music and that of Cuban *son montuno*. Given *boogaloo*'s immense popularity among U.S. Latinos during its era and its current resurgence, we can conclude that the Latin musicians, dancers, and audiences involved in *boogaloo*'s aesthetic experience feel the same affinities.

Conversely, if certain aspects of one musical tradition are consciously avoided when crafting new musical styles or genres, this indicates antipathy, a feeling that, for cultural, aesthetic, or stylistic reasons, the proposed fusion involves too many incompatible elements. A progressive jazz piece in an "odd meter" such as 7/8 or 11/16

may require so many adjustments to the binary *clave* that it loses its essence and is thus scrapped.

Necessity is a practical motivator driving all sorts of musical mixtures, from the combinations of multiple drum parts into one, to the application of percussion “ghost notes” to *timba* piano’s left hand. Other examples of affinity, antipathy, and necessity populate the following pages.

Vocabulary Affinities

Musical affinities, in contrast to the subconscious human responses to environmental soundscapes, are inherently elective and selective, asserting aural similarities often where cultural differences abound, reinforcing my argument that not all musical utterances are simply the result of cultural norms, but emerge out of specifically musical and sonic selection. Sonic affinity makes sense and harmony out of discord and dissonance, and may be at odds with established cultural expectations and practices. In this sonic musical mixture paradigm, affinity leads to three kinds of assimilation: quotation, adaptation, and abstraction.

Quotation is one of the easiest musical arguments to spot and follow; it contends that a musical vocabulary fragment from one genre can happily reside in another and is recognized as coming from elsewhere. Audio example 5.02, the 1941 *danzón* “Rosa que

no se Marchita” by Orestes and Israel López, quotes Maurice Ravel’s “Pavane pour une Infant Défunte” (Op.19) in its second *melodía* section, followed by a quotation of the Cuban *estribillo* “A buscar Camarón” for its *mambo* section. Quotation is how a Mexican *bolero* played by a New York *salsa* band acquires dainty classical filigree and densely chromatic jazz harmony. It is how Bob Marley’s “No Woman, No Cry” becomes a ubiquitous *timba coro* during the 1990s, liberally quoted in songs by Charanga Habanera and Issac Delgado. It is how *rumba* groups such as Yoruba Andabo or Iroso Obá introduce funk-based breakdowns into *guaguancó* and *guararapachangueo*. Sometimes, as in the rural/urban trajectory of Cuban *son* from its rural antecedents including *nengón* and *changüí*, aesthetic decisions regarding the fusion of disparate musical elements take decades to crystallize. Other times, such as the evolution of the *mambo* during the 1940s or *salsa* during the 1970s, the evolution occurs in close parallel, with different musicians and composers arriving at similar conclusions via different pathways.⁸²

Timbral Affinities

Especially when moments of musical encounter have receded into the past, beyond any living musician’s recollection, the blending of timbral, melodic, rhythmic,

⁸² Regarding the evolution of the *mambo* in the 1940s, see Sánchez (1983) and García (2005). Similarly, regarding the *salsa* in the 1970s, see Andres Espinoza Agurto, “Una Sola Casa: Salsa Consciente and the Poetics of the Meta-Barrio” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2014), Langford (1999), Rivera (1998), Brittmarie Pérez, “Political Facets of Salsa,” *Popular Music* 6 no.2 (1987): 149-59; Rondón (2008), Christopher Washburne, *Sounding Salsa: Performing Latin Music in New York City* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2008); Galen DeGraf, “Situating Salsa Through Tito Puente’s Life and Music” (B.A. thesis, Wesleyan University, 2009); and Flores (2016).

and harmonic vocabularies can be speculatively reverse engineered from the only remaining evidence: the sounds themselves transmitted across generations of musicians' memories, and often manifested in human recorded music. Many of these musical connections do not appear in straight chronological lines of commercial or private recordings. For instance, the *changüí*-inspired clavecization of the *nengón* motif in Arsenio Rodríguez's "Zumba" (discussed in chapter 7), had already circulated throughout Latin America and U.S. Latin enclaves long before *changüí* was first recorded in the early 1980s by Grupo Changuí de Guantánamo. Most New York percussionists encountered *conga* versions of *abacué* drumming on 1950s albums such as Mongo Santamaría's *Drums and Chants* before ever hearing traditional *abacué* drums in their ceremonial contexts. Yet this idea of one instrument's timbre substituting for another was a historical fixture of Cuba's musical development.

Few Cuban musicians remember exactly when or how *tumbadoras* (*congas*) acquired the lead and supporting drum parts from folkloric rhythms such as Bakosó, Cyclo Congo, or Abacué. But hearing the actual sounds of these traditional folkloric rhythms played on their respective drums, juxtaposed with their realizations on the creolized *conga* make a musical affinity sonically clear. Other examples of timbral affinity wind throughout Afro-Diasporic musics like an ancestral whisper on the wind in a language no one speaks anymore. Throughout the Afro-Diasporic Caribbean, the indigenous *güiro* (gourd scraper) was incorporated into French *contradanse* to form the

Cuban *danzón* and the Puerto Rican *danza*.⁸³ In rural provinces of the Dominican Republic, this same gourd and scraper acquired a metallic variant and fused with the African-derived *tambora* and German accordion to form Dominican *merengue*.⁸⁴ The metal *guira* or *guayo*, initially fashioned from the cheese grater, clearly sounded sufficiently similar to the original gourd, but was able to project more loudly over other instruments.

In terms of timbre's relationship to gesture and texture, the porting of anticipated bass lines from the marimbula to the acoustic, upright and electric bass, represented a timbral affinity based on pitch variety, since *marímbulas*' three to nine metal tongs were imprecisely tuned to one another.⁸⁵ The string bass offered musicians the same kind of decaying percussive timbre with an entirely microtonal pitch collection that could be used to outline any harmonic progression.

In chapter 1, I explored the sonic affinities between the Cuban *tres*'s octave and unison double strings and the piano's ability to switch textures between single notes and octaves.⁸⁶ In addition to the piano's ability to voice chords with more available pitches than the *tres*, the piano's percussive qualities allowed it to take on more of a neo-African

⁸³ Peter Manuel, editor. *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean: Studies in Latin America and Caribbean Music* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2009), 71, 160.

⁸⁴ Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1997), 57-63, 66-70.

⁸⁵ Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos de la Musica Afro-Cubana*, Vol. 2 (Madrid: Música Mundana Maqueda 1952-1955): 76, 90, 229; and Benjamin Lapidus, "Stirring the Ajiaco," in *Cuban Counterpoints: The Legacy of Fernando Ortiz*, edited by Mauricio Font and Alfonso Quinó (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Press, 2005): 53.

⁸⁶ Hill, "Conjunto Piano," 69-96.

role compared to other European melodic/harmonic instruments. Towit, Nigerian composer Akin Euba famously wrote in a 1970 essay:

For those composers interested in cross-cultural musical synthesis [there is] a line of evolution in the use of the Western pianoforte in combination with African drums and other instruments of percussion. The piano already displays certain affinities with African music, and by creating a type of African pianism to blend with African instruments it should be possible to achieve a successful fusion. The piano first appeared in Nigeria in the middle of the nineteenth century and since then has remained popular. Today, it is one of the most common musical instruments in schools, colleges, universities, and in the homes of middle class families. The piano has important qualities similar to Nigerian instruments (such as ngedegwu — Igbo xylophone and dundun — Yoruba talking drum) in its melo-rhythmic and percussive character. This makes it particularly suitable for representing elements of Nigerian music.⁸⁷

It is particularly gratifying that Euba uses musical affinity in the same sense as does this analytical model. In fact, the entire history of Cuban/Latin pianism can be interpreted as an extended argument in favor of the sonic affinities between West African and European instruments, gestures, textures, and formal structures.

Melodic Affinities

The next level up from timbral affinity involves pitch, encompassing melody, and harmony. In contrast to timbral affinities, melodic affinities make the sonic argument that melodic scales, modes, contours, and cadential formulae from one musical system make

⁸⁷ Akin Euba, "Traditional Elements as the Basis of New African Art Music," *African Urban Notes* 5 no.4 (1970): 52.

sonic sense in another, often despite timbral differences. Melodic affinity facilitated the incorporation of heptatonic Roman Catholic hymn melodies into the song texts used for orisha worship in the Yoruba-based *Lukumí* religion, as well as the association of solo violin with the *orisha* Ochún. Melodic affinity allowed the mixture of *rumba*'s percussive rhythms played by dockworkers in Havana and Matanzas with melodic phrases (called *dianas*) from Spanish Flamenco to form *rumba*'s bedrock.

Melodic Contrast

With other types of melodic affinity, the sonic argument is difficult to tease out from the sounds themselves, in the sense that an immediately perceptible aural explanation seems elusive. Consider, for instance, the grafting of ornate Western classical flute soloing gestures into the Cuban *charanga*, or equally elaborate nineteenth century Western classical piano textures into the *son montuno* solo. These syntheses of Western art music's narrativity with the African-derived cyclical harmonic and rhythmic structures are found in Cuban/Latin *montunos*. *Timba*'s frequent mixtures of pentatonic *coros* with jazz-inflected chromatic harmony may in fact mirror similar processes of mixtures between African-American blues and additive chromatic harmony derived from twentieth-century French art music composers such as Debussy, Ravel, and Milhaud. Many Cuban *timba* musicians have expressed particular fondness for the combination of what they perceive as static pentatonic melodies with nonfunctional triadic progressions

with frequently shifting tonal centers. The predilection for this mixture can be found in the arrangements of Geraldo Piloto, Joaquín Betancourt, and Juan Ceruto. Practically speaking, any harmonic progression can be pianistically realized in various styles, from pattern-based *salsa* to gesturally-/texturally-saturated *timba*. Moreover, these treatments often appear within the same arrangements, as discussed in chapters 6, 7, and 8.

European Art Music, Polytonality, and Pendular Tonality

No discussion of Afro-Cuban/Latin popular music's pianistic vocabulary could be complete without an inventory of gestures, textures, melodic cells, and tonal progressions initially lifted from European art music and subsequently transformed to suit Afro-Cuban popular music's increasing Africanization. Cuban/Latin piano can thus be historically analyzed as an extended sonic argument asserting that Western art music gestures and textures could coexist alongside West African and Creole vocabularies drawn from Afro-Cuban folkloric songs and rhythms.

The pianoforte's physical design, gestural/textural vocabularies, and classical repertoires are indubitably of European origin. Yet, as with numerous European instruments exported to the New World, the Americas' ethnic, racial, and sociocultural circumstances gave way, by necessity, to a recontextualization of the piano with a mandate to fulfill other purposes than ones filled in Europe. This was a Creole mandate embodying the sonic argument that the European piano could fulfill both its traditional

roles and many other African-derived ensemble roles using art music's gestural/textural vocabulary. Yet, it has never been unique to Cuba.

In the United States, jazz piano's vocabulary was based on Western classical elements, chiefly taken from eighteenth and nineteenth-century "standard" repertoires. However, jazz piano's gestural/textural vocabulary was gradually augmented by chromatic simulations of microtonal "blue" notes, ragtime polyrhythms and syncopations, bebop triplet phrasing, boogie-woogie bass lines, quartal chord voicings, etc. When closely analyzed, many of these gestures and textures represent all sorts of syntheses between classical, West African, and Creole elements to such an extent of commingling that it becomes difficult to designate exactly which elements belong purely to each parent culture. For instance, the frequent alternation of octaves and complementary chord pitches to form arpeggiated triads, found in Rachmaninoff's concerti and etudes tableaux, become right-hand matrices for jazz stride piano in the 1920s and early forms of Cuban *montuneo* by the 1930s. The tripartite texture of bass lines, chords, and melody, found in classical repertoires as disparate as Bach's organ trio sonatas and Chopin's piano nocturnes, is rhythmically reimagined and repurposed by jazz and Afro-Cuban pianists alike to serve the cadential requirements posed by West African-derived rhythmic cells such as the *cinquillo* and amphibrach. In these and many other instances, the repurposing of the piano's Western classical gestures and textures belies a uniquely New World and Creole value structure. The left-hand "oom pa" texture of bass and chords, in the Creole Cuban context, represents a simulation of supporting parts in West African drum and

balaphon ensembles. As such, these composite ensemble matrices eventually give way to the conceptualization of the piano's role within various popular music ensemble structures, using its registers in cooperation with bass and percussion to produce new amalgamated vocabularies and treatments unique to the popular Cuban/Latin context.

Western art music, first brought to Cuba with Spanish colonialism, has therefore constituted a conceptual bedrock governing harmonic instrumental performance, notational conventions, and compositional techniques associated with motivic development in Cuba. Rigorously taught in Cuba's conservatories and inherently familiar to Latin American pianists, classical vocabularies and repertoire shape compositional and improvisational vocabularies by providing popular pianists with raw materials that I divide into gestures and textures. At their core, the separation of gestures and textures in the popular Latin music context facilitates the separate analyses of musical ideas from audible musical events encompassing realization and treatment options. This is how *tres* or violin *guajeos* are applied to the piano, often with octave doubling or intermanual reharmonizations. As musical ideas, gestures must be reduceable to musical phrases concrete enough to be duplicated, but sufficiently flexible to be presented with different textural treatments. Gestures therefore comprise melodic and harmonic motifs, melodic shapes, contrapuntal voice-leading formulae, harmonic progressions, and other compositional devices.⁸⁸ Textures, on the other hand, are pianistically idiomatic,

⁸⁸ Eugene Narmour, *The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Complexity: The Implication-Realization Model* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11, 54, 57, 61, 63, 107, 212.

including scalar and chromatic runs, arpeggios, interlocking octaves, double third and double sixth passagework, cambiata figures, melodic figurations, and parallel chord plaining, among others. During their early formations, whether in Cuba's conservatories or New York's music schools, Latin pianists first gain exposure to the canonical Western classical piano literature of the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, as well as the nineteenth and twentieth-century Cuban classical repertoires that first grappled with West African-based rhythmic and melodic cells. Through this repertoire, Latin pianists imbibe large-scale principles of musical narrativity and phrase structure.

Afroubanismo, Generative Rhythmic Cells, and Notation

Cuban musicologist Alejo Carpentier (1947) notes that early examples of Cuban classical music composition adhered to Iberian and continental European models.⁸⁹ However, beginning in the nineteenth and stretching into the twentieth century Afroubanismo movement, the works of Ignacio Cervantes, Alejandro García Caturla, Amadeo Roldán, Ernesto Lecuona, and other classical composers incorporated indigenous rhythmic and melodic cells (e.g., *cinquillo*, *tresillo*, amphibrach, *clave*, *comparsa*, and *rumba* patterns). These indigenous incorporations were often augmented by combinations of African pentatonicism with Western classical major/minor tonality,

⁸⁹ Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba 1523-1900*, 2nd ed., Tim Brennan, editor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 373.

added harmony, and modality.⁹⁰ Moreover, the rhythmic cells employed by Creole Cuban composers to impart stylized blackness are themselves simplifications of the large-scale improvisation and variation phrases that convey the essence of various folkloric genres. The Afrocubanismo movement nonetheless provided a fundamental notational template used to this day by popular musicians to represent phrases far beyond generative *cinquillo* and *tresillo* patterns.

Polytonality

The interaction between West African and Iberian elements within Cuba's musical world has not been restricted to Afrocubanismo art music; it has also taken place within popular genres.⁹¹ As pentatonic and modal vestiges of West African melody interact with European harmonic teleology, a pervasive form of polytonality emerges that is quite different from the twentieth-century experiments of Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky, or Aaron Copland, for whom polytonality's charm resides in the juxtaposition of major or minor keys sharing few or no common pitches.⁹² It is also different from the polytonality arising from tonalities built on symmetrical octave divisions such as Alexander Scriabin's extensive use of the octatonic pitch collection or Olivier Messiaen's modes of limited transposition. Polytonality in Cuban art music and Latin popular musics

⁹⁰ Lezcano 1991; Mario Ray, "The Rhythmic Component of Afrocubanismo in the Art Music of Cuba," *Black Music Research Journal* 26 no.2 (Fall 2006): 190.

⁹¹ Peter Manuel, "The *Guajira* Between Cuba and Spain: A Study in Continuity and Change," *Latin American Music Review* 25 no.2 (2004): 137-62.

⁹² Timothy Hughes, "Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2003).

instead relies on a network of shared rotationally cyclical pentatonic, hexatonic, and heptatonic pitch collections, meeting within harmonic rubrics, yet diverging as modal and tonal, melodic and harmonic, implications pull the music in different directions. This polytonality assumes various forms, usually containing diatonic or chromatic chordal plaining or contrary motion contrapuntal harmonizations of folkloric melodies.

In Arsenio Rodríguez's *lamentos afrocubanos*, pentatonic melodies interact with tonally functional and chromatic triadic harmonies, often using symmetrical octave divisions such as the whole-tone or octatonic scales. In the 1940s *mambos* of Bebo Valdés and Dámaso Pérez Prado, West African-derived mixolydian and pentatonic melodies are set against extended chromatic jazz harmonies using added ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords. Today, *salsa* and *timba* *coros* and horn *moñas* often rely on a mixture of folkloric melodies, hip hop, and nursery rhymes. Piano *tumbaos* set these sometimes simple melodic refrains against elaborate jazz-inflected harmonizations from U.S. fusion jazz, gospel, and funk, creating deliberate polytonality.

Pendular Tonality, Rotational Equivalence and Musical Travel

In his 2007 paper "Tonalidad, Tradición, y el Sabor del *Son Cubano*," Peter Manuel analyzes selected Arsenio Rodríguez compositions in terms of dual harmonic tonicity and tonal/modal ambiguity, suggesting that Cuban music's preoccupation with pendular tonality may have its roots in eighteenth-century Spanish *fandangos* and

chaconas, which often cadence on dominant chords, evoking phrygian and mixolydian modalities.⁹³ In the popular Latin music context, compositions in mixolydian and phrygian tonalities represent the synthesis of ancient church modes and the implicit tonalities in West African monophonic or polyphonic songs (e.g., *kora* music from Senegambia, Yoruba *oriki*, etc.). Harmonic progressions can therefore be grouped by rotational equivalencies analogous to rotationally equivalent rhythmic cells. Particularly in *montuno* sections, *salsa*, and *timba* arrangements make use of rotationally displaced harmonic progressions, varying them with diatonically and chromatically generated harmonic substitutions, song-specific *coros*, *mambos*, and gesturally rich piano *tumbaos*. These recurring harmonic progression patterns found in so much of Cuban-derived popular musics form the foundation upon which song-specific *timba* piano and bass *tumbaos* are built. The rotational symmetries between rhythmic cells modal tonics and harmonic progressions serve as vital conceptual links between Iberian, West African, and Afro-Diasporic genres. They may also constitute the sonic travel routes that have given rise to the musical mobility, musical mixture, and fusion so characteristic of the African diaspora.

⁹³ Peter Manuel, “Tonalidad, Tradición, y el Sabor del *Son Cubano*.”

Repertory Affinities

Repertory affinities are predicated upon the sonic argument that certain aspects of different repertoires can be separated from their genre associations and standard musical treatments and given new treatments associated with different genres. For instance, Arsenio Rodríguez's 1963 album *Quindembo Afro Magic: La Magia De Arsenio* fuses entire Afro-Cuban *Lukumí*, Congo and Abacua songs with jazz harmony and swing rhythm. In addition to the traditional drums, sticks, and bells associated with these folkloric Cuban genres, we hear drumset, piano, acoustic bass, alto and tenor saxophones, and Arsenio's glorious *tres*. The final track of Arsenio's final album *Arsenio Dice* (1968) blends Congo-derived Yuka and Makuta *mambo* (story or riddle) songs with rock-and-roll breaks, swing sections and a *son montuno* "singing" bass line in which the I-V-IV-V-ii-V-ii-V harmonic progression in E-flat major is intriguingly represented by an atypical amount of chord inversions (audio example 5.03). Here, the sonic argument surrounds the primary I-IV-V harmonic progressions common to early rock-and-roll and *son montuno*, and the implicit diatonicism of folkloric Yuka and Makuta songs. This template fusing traditional folkloric Afro-Cuban songs with popular music instrumentation and harmonic progression was frequently followed in New York *salsa*, on albums by Richie Ray and Willie Colón.

Abstract Procedure Affinities

Abstract procedures may run in parallel between seemingly unrelated instruments or musical styles; yet, their commonalities also evince affinity. The analogous procedure of internal interlock, common to *conga marcha* creation, *batá* rhythm elaboration, drum kit coordination and piano *tumbaos*, displays an aesthetic affinity between the palm-tip *manoteo* on *congas*, ghost notes on drumset, and *fantasmas* (fingertip touches) on *batá*. The sense of affinity results from a common need or desire to fill in the rhythmic spaces between “speaking” notes or pulses. Yet, whereas the *conguero*’s *manoteo* or the *olu batá* drummer’s *fantasmas* to fill in the main or “speaking” notes of a rhythmic pattern or phrase, their process, unlike that of *timba* pianists and *tecladistas*, does not concern the pitched analogue of left-hand chord tones. This is an example of analogous elaboration on the abstract procedural level, on different instruments, with different vocabularies and in service of different repertoires.

Moreover, the internal interlock on *batá*, *conga*, and piano is not only the result of the creative application of an abstract procedure to different instruments and genres; it has also affected the generation of new ideas within those musical contexts (consult audio example 5.04).⁹⁴ For Manley López Herrera, the youngest member of Havana’s legendary Chinitos family:

⁹⁴ Audio example 5.04 is of Manley “Piri” López Herrera demonstrating how *fantasmas* on the lowest lead *batá* suggest cross-rhythms of 3, 5, and 7 against the decidedly duple bass played by the middle and highest *batá* drums.

One of the most important aspects of modern *batá* drumming is the so-called *fantasmas*. *Fantasmas* have enriched the way *batá* are played. *Fantasmas* are the soul of *batá* now. There are lots of tricks and things that one can change using rhythmic displacement. Everything comes out of that. *Fantasmas* are the soul of *batá* today. They have made it possible to develop and increment the modern approach.⁹⁵

Resulting from attitudinal affinity, internal interlock is the unifying treatment possible in all these disparate situations, transporting the ghost note solution from percussion to piano. This treatment method of auto-interlock is only one of the myriad elements that amalgamate into an internationally distinct musical *cubaneo*. In pianistic terms, the distinctly Cuban sonic markers developed over the past forty years have taken place on all three levels (vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures), mostly involving an expanded gestural/textural vocabulary and a shift from literal repetition toward controlled improvisation and narrativity.

Antipathy

Just as sonic affinity leads to various kinds of assimilation, antipathy yields a continuum of manifestations, from implicit or explicit rejection to radical and extensive alteration. For affinity and antipathy to be used as catalysts for musical mixture, sonic events, including timbres, vocal techniques, instrumentation, texts, or performing environments, are culturally understood as signals of who is making the music and what

⁹⁵ Manley López Herrera, interview with author, 2011.

it signifies to its intended audience. This communicative system works best when musicians and audiences align in their interpretations of sonic signs.

Within the Cuban/Latin context, specific timbres and musical events signify broad genre categories. Western instruments played by well-dressed musicians reading scores usually signify art music. *Congas*, *cajones*, and *claves* are all percussion instruments identified with *rumba*. The three *batá* drums signify Yoruba-derived spiritual traditions. Sonic signs also point to repertoires associated with specific social situations. Thus, a *bolero*'s strains convey romanticism, while a *timba despelote* signifies street life aggressivity. Although most Cuban instruments, timbres, vocabularies, and repertoires signify specific genres, the very nature of musical mixture within the Cuban context therefore involves subverting all the signified/signifier relationships taken for granted by Cuban and Latin musicians, listeners, dancers and audiences. For instance, in order for a Carlos Gardel *tango* to work as a *guaguancó*, the sonic profiles associated with *tango* and *guaguancó* must be separated from their cultural contexts. To the Cuban *rumbero*, the *tango*'s lyrics, often full of Lumfardo slang, must not transport them to Buenos Aires or Montevideo; they must be given a new home in Havana's *solares* where predominantly black Cubans still enjoy *guaguancó*.

Which musical elements get recontextualized as semiotic signs depends upon the structural role played by each musical element being combined. In the case of a *tango* sung as *guaguancó*, the drums and percussion associated with *rumba* are treated as the

musical base upon which a *tango* can be placed. In the inverse situation, the *tango*'s rhythmic orientation may not easily serve as a suitable base for *guaguancó*'s *claves*, *guagua*, *salidor*, *tres dos*, and *quinto*. Therefore, when musicians propose experimental mashups or mixtures, they first evaluate how the elements will be overlaid or juxtaposed, which music will serve as the base or fundamental and which music will serve as thematic material. In genres such as *songo* and *timba*, these calculations are applied to dozens of musical elements, each being evaluated in terms of their potential roles within the Cuban popular music aesthetic.

It is in cases where elements in a musical mixture seem least compatible that the mixture is either culturally rejected as unfeasible or embraced as being new, different and good. For instance, when rural Iberian-based *punto guajiro*'s archaic Spanish ten-line *décimas* became outfitted with ternary West African-derived percussion accompaniment patterns, those percussion patterns would have initially sounded out of place with *punto guajiro*'s guitar and *laúd* strums and runs. Yet, this fusion of specifically Iberian musical genres with Creole Cuban percussion led to an entire subgenre of *música campecina*, popularized by artists made famous in the 1950s such as Celina González, Guillermo Portabales, and Ramón Velos. When Juan Formell added electric bass, Farfisa organ, electric guitar, and drum kit to Elio Revé's traditional *charanga*, the result was Los Van

Van's *songo*, a fusion of psychedelic rock and traditional Cuban rhythms, described to me by Iván "Melón Lewis as 'a type of rock with a Cuban sensibility.'⁹⁶

The synthesized siren effects and electronic drums in Adalberto Álvarez's 1986 album *El Fin de Semana*, were certainly not in keeping with his *santiaguero* roots and overtly traditional aesthetics made famous in his first group Son 14. When black American 1970s signature Earth Wind and Fire horn clarions were repurposed to open *Charanga Habanera*'s 1990s *timba* tours abroad and amphitheater concerts within Cuba, the result, according to some, was jarring. Yet, within a few years, sonic markers from African-American R&B, gospel, and jazz became normative in *timba* arrangements. These examples demonstrate that initially baffling musical mixtures can eventually gaining acceptance, provided that the sonic argument convinces listeners and dancers that these fusions make sense.

Within the contemporary *salsa* context, a striking example of antipathy is at work. *Salsa dura* (hard salsa) bands specifically and deliberately eschew every feature of *salsa romántica*, from its sensual lyrics and balada melodies to its straight-laced arrangements and recording conventions. These bands aim to recreate the spirit and substance of 1970s classic New York *salsa*, with song lyrics portraying daily *barrio* life, unique arrangements, layered *moñas*, solos, and breaks. The *salsa dura*'s mandate thus takes place on all three aforementioned musical mixture levels. It also reveals perhaps the final component of musical mixture: intention.

⁹⁶ Iván Lewis, interview with author, September 24, 2013.

Intention

In the previous chapter, I introduced a parametric template for quantifying levels of musical stasis and change: vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures. In this chapter, I have proposed a continuum of musical mixture catalysts: affinity and antipathy at its extremes and necessity as the fulcrum. This brings us to the intentions behind musical mixture. Here, we examine the expressed intentions behind proposed musical mixture experiments and, using our analytical model, evaluate whether these intentions have been achieved using two criteria: ideas and events. Affinity thus belies the intention to make many seemingly incompatible musical elements coexist in a new form, each being adapted to different extents in search of a generalizable musical moment that grows an idea from a momentary or one-time experience into a pattern for a new genre. Most musical innovations begin with ideas, some of which seem better than others. New ideas often meet resistance before and after their initial presentation, either as abstractions or concretudes. In musical mixture, ideas can include a proposed melding of genres, inclusion of elements foreign to that genre, adaptations of one set of vocabularies, repertoires, or abstract procedures between stylistic traditions. However, only through actual musical events can the efficacy or validity of these ideas be tested. By efficacy and validity, I mean the satisfaction of specific intention criteria using between a new musical mixture's constituent elements. If the intention is to create danceable music, groove and tempo may matter more than harmonic complexity or abstract applications of one instrument's matrix on to another. If the intent is to make complex music, the ways in

which genre elements are layered may make or break the mixture as an idea based on how it feels for everyone involved.

For instance, various *salsa* and *timba* musicians have experimented with the use of backbeat-based drum kit patterns grafted on to *clave*-based *salsa*, banking on the accentual affinity between the backbeat on 2 and 4 (in common time), and the *clave*'s 2-side. The *clave*'s 3-side, on the other hand, contains no backbeat pulse. I have heard Cuban and Latin musicians disparage the backbeat on the 3-side as being *contra-clave*. Therefore, the drum kit player or programmer/sequencer should avoid the backbeat on the *clave*'s 3-side, thus creating a four-beat hyper-cycle instead of the two-beat backbeat cycle.

Other examples of musical mixture ideas and implementations can also prove problematic, especially when harmonic and percussion instruments “compete” or fight over the same rhythmic pulses in interlocking patterns. The fusion of *Lukumí* ocha songs (with their requisite *batá* rhythms) and electronic synthesizers, as in the Cuban groups Mezcla and Síntesis experiments, evince an uneasy relationship between the *batá*'s interlocking rhythmic patterns and conversations with elaborate synthesized arrangements. Here, the conflict takes place primarily on the vocabulary level of interlocking patterns using the same density referential or N-cycle. Contrapuntal wisdom advises against too many parts moving on the same metrical level, lest the result become homophony. In traditional *Lukumí* ceremonies, no other instruments besides the *batá*

accompany ritual songs, conveniently relegating both vocal and instrumental vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures to their own respective domains. Dense instrumental arrangements therefore tend to obscure or clash with the *batá* battery's interlocking patterns. Some musical mixtures, such as *rumba* with jazz, end up reducing both traditions down to *clichés*, with the jazz elements constricted by *rumba*'s syncopated phrasing and the *rumba* melodic elements crowded by jazz figurations.

Necessity

In this chapter's analytical framework, necessity has been situated as a midpoint between affinity and antipathy, since it often imposes its own logic upon the circumstances surrounding musical mixtures. For instance, the ceremonial need for cheaper alternatives to the costly *batá fundamento* (sacred consecrated drums) brought about both the invention of *batá* drums tunable with metal hardware and, more recently, *batá cajones*, where the two drum heads are simulated using differing thicknesses and surface shapes on a conically shaped wooden box. Necessity has clearly motivated the rethinking of the conversational aesthetic in folkloric genres themselves, especially in the modern *rumba* subgenre known as *guarapachangueo*, initially created by Havana's Los Chinitos family. Cuban *rumba guarapachangueo* pioneer Pedro Lopez Rodríguez described the Chinitos family's creative process in crafting *guarapachangueo* out of their family makeup's practical ramifications:

Over time, during the 1970s and 1980s—around 1975 or 1976—we set about creating a type of polyrhythm. A friend of ours, one of the greatest Cuban *rumberos*, called Jesús “el llanero” Martínez, gave our rhythm the pejorative name, *guarapachangueo*. Chappottín had a song, “*La guarapachanga*”. So, one time during a *rumba*, *el llanero* got up to sing and everything was ready for him: the *clave* and *guagua*, *tumbador*, and *quinto*. So we said, ‘Go ahead, sing something,’ and he said, ‘Yes yes yes, I hear everything. But what is this *guarapachangueo* that you’re putting in here? My cousin, Wicho, and I initiated this because of a problem, a moment of spontaneous distraction; it wasn’t done with the idea that it would have so much value today. We would go in the back yard with one of my grandmother Mamaíta’s night tables that we made into a *quinto*. My uncle had made a box for his fan’s motor; we used that for the *guarapachanguero*. We were playing *rumba* with three *gícamos* (*tumbadoras*) and we omitted one, the *tres dos*, and we left the *tumbadora* to combine both parts into one: *tumbadora* and *tres dos*, plus the *quinto*. It served us well that we are all *rumberos*, but we were always short. Ray would take the *claves*, Bertico on the *guagua* or the *quinto*, or sometimes the inverse, we would switch up. And that’s how the *guarapachangueo* started: we omitted one *tumbadora* and we created this polyrhythm by simplifying something. And now I have the greatest and most sacred blessing in my life; that’s my son, Piri, and everything has remained.⁹⁷

In combining the patterns and conversations of *rumba*’s two lower supporting drums, *tumbadora*, and *tres dos*, *guarapachangueo* makes some compelling musical arguments. First, there is sufficient pattern overlap between both drums to combine them into one. Second, the call and response conversations used in *batá* drumming, in which *los Chinitos* are proficient, can just as easily take place between the *guarapachanguero* (amalgamated lower drum) and the *quinto*. To facilitate this, both “drummers” in *guarapachangueo* use *congas*, *cajones*, and sometimes *batá* drums (on stands or on the floor) to maximize melodic conversational variety while minimizing the doublings that result from interlocking ensemble parts.

⁹⁷ Pedro Lopez Rodríguez, interview with author, 2011.

I have heard many similar musical mixture creation stories like those of *guarapachangueo*, arising from practical circumstances: a missing instrument, the need to save money by omitting a musician, a response to positive or negative feedback from dancers. The post-revolutionary Cuban use of the electric bass initially arose from the unavailability of fretless electric upright or baby basses prized in Latin music. Cuban bassists such as Juan Formel, Carlos de Puerto, Feliciano Arango, and Alain Pérez, as well as non-Cuban Latin bassists Bobby Valentín, Salvador Cuevas, and Rubén Rodríguez, designed a bass vocabulary that did not rely on the baby bass's percussive attack and quickly decaying sustain. Rather, notes were sustained for less time than would be customary in the anticipated or singing bass. This gave rise to denser harmonic progressions using more chords per *clave* cycle.

During the 1970s, Juan Formell outlined harmonic patterns using formulae lifted from African-American bassist James Jamerson's legendary Motown work. Carlos Del Puerto, in Irakere, incorporated the walking jazz bass and various soul music gestures into his playing. Meanwhile, in New York, few musicians could forget Salvador Cuevas' opening funky bass on "Plástico," the first track off the highest-selling *salsa* album of all time, Willie Colón and Rubén Blades's *Siembra* (1978). Vocal improvisations from this song have entered the repertoire of quotes from *salsa* songs (audio example 5.06).

By 1989, Feliciano Arango in NG La Banda and New York bassist Rubén Rodríguez had revolutionized the Cuban/Latin bass vocabulary by incorporating Jaco

Pastorius' legendary "modal" and chromatic jazz lines, weaving them in and out of traditional bass patterns. By 1995, emerging *timba* stars Issac Delgado, Paulo FG, and Manolín González, responding to dancer feedback, began making their music more aggressive, borrowing overtly from African-American funk. Issac Delgado's bassist Alain Pérez claimed James Jamerson and Bootsy Collins as influences. His bass lines snapped, popped, and boomed, all the while never abandoning the folkloric and traditional popular patterns.

Using the above analytical model of affinity, antipathy, and necessity, I now trace a particular process that has yielded many fertile musical mixtures within Cuban/Latin folkloric and popular musics: the conversation aesthetic.

The Conversation Aesthetic

Although Cuban/Latin music's harmonic instruments (including bass and piano) owe much of their fundamental vocabulary to Western art music, West African aesthetics have always played an important role. In chapter 3, I explored the Cuban *clave* concept as one of the most structurally vital rubrics for folkloric and popular music organization, arguing that the Cuba *clave*, being derived from West African timeline *topoi*, is a useful analytical tool for rhythmic and cadential analyses of traditional West African musics. Here, I explore another West African-derived aesthetic principle: conversation, or talking, as in talking drum.

The conversational aesthetic permeates nearly every type of sacred and secular Cuban folkloric music. *Lukumí batá* probably established its presence in Cuba via Yoruba slaves brought to the island as late as 1875. In their syncretic religious traditions, the *batá* drums used in Cuban *Lukumí* rituals are believed by that religion's adherents to speak directly with the *orishas* (deities, archetypes, or spirits). Yet, few living Cuban *batá* drummers can chant the drums' surrogate speech beyond a few phrases. By contrast, Yoruba *batá*'s surrogate speech rules of drum language map drum strokes to spoken Yoruba vowel and consonant sounds.⁹⁸ The *batá*'s surrogate speech matrix uses three approaches to convey linguistic tonality and stress: (1) alternation of low and high sounds produced by each drum head; (2) melodic conversation between the larger heads of the *iyá* (lead drum) and *itótele* (second or "following" drum); and (3) alternating conversations, in which *iyá* and *itótele* alternate complete phrases.

Given these three types of conversation, today's *batá* drummers "talk" in a musically abstract drum language that is not literal surrogate speech, but rather bases itself stylistically upon the older form. Over the past thirty years, especially in the Havana *batá* tradition, the presumed surrogate speech corpus has been enhanced with non-surrogate speech *floreos* (decorations) and *inventos* (inventions). Especially younger *batá* players, including the members of Abbilona and Manley "Piri" López Herrera have used these *floreos* and *inventos* as abstract creative outlets, using the *batá* rhythms as bases for rhythmic displacement, cross-rhythm, syncopation, and conversation interpolation

⁹⁸ Schweitzer 2003 and Villepastour 2010.

techniques. Therefore, since Cuban *Lukumí* practitioners still believe that the drums communicate with the *orishas* even though the linguistic specifics have been lost, another definition of “talking” or conversation must be at work.

The *batá* conversation aesthetic has been transferred to secular instruments for nearly a century. From traditional *son*’s *bongo* marking matrix and *son montuno*’s *tumba y bongo* interactive approach, to percussion soloing in the *descarga* (jam session) format, Cuban and Latin percussionists have been preoccupied with making their instruments “talk” in a manner that is aesthetically, if not literally, related to the *batá*. Canadian scholar and percussionist Mario Allende speaks of Cuban percussionist José Kluis “Changuito” Quintana’s playing:

What Chango does is: he talks. It's like, who out here even knows how to talk on a drum? What does talk mean? I think it has something to do with this thing that separates Changuito from Richie Flores or even from Pedrito Martínez. There's a difference in what Chango lays down. With one note, he can say more than these other cats say with a thousand notes. That is what I'm after in my research: What is it? How is he charging that one note up? How does he know when to leave it in, when to take it out? How does he know with one note, or how can he say with one note, ‘Boom! This is a *rumba*; this is a party; there are people dancing.’ He's telling a story with one note. He's talking, in the same way that maybe the heavy *batá* guys talk, maybe the way the guys in Africa used to talk with the drum, like really talk. I think Chango has his finger on that pulse, whereas I have to say that few of us have our fingers on it.⁹⁹

Allende’s comments regarding Changuito’s sparse conversational style constitute a sonic argument based on the timbral and structural affinities between Yoruba and

⁹⁹ Mario Allende, interview with author, October 2012.

Lukumí batá, on one hand, and secular popular Cuban/Latin percussion. Changuito himself has overtly discussed these sonic affinities. I have heard Changuito, at percussion clinics, backstage at concerts, and in his living room, point out that even creolized Cuban percussion instruments such as *conga*, *bongá*, and *timba* are analogous to what he calls *instrumentos transmisores* (transmission instruments) used in West Africa to send messages between villages and tribes. Having no concrete messages to send, Cuban and Latin secular percussionists have nonetheless maintained the generalized stylistic flavor of surrogate speech outside of ceremonial or social contexts where speech matters. For Changuito and other Cuban/Latin percussionists over the past seventy years, sparse phrasing across ceremonial and social folkloric genres, as well as many popular music genres, represents all three levels of affinity. Although the Cuban *Lukumí* and Yoruba *batá* drums have evolved in different directions, with the Cuban version using three drums all played by the hands, and the Yoruba version in Nigeria and Benin using up to six, many played with thin sticks, the essential conversation aesthetic has remained intact. Both Cuban *batá* have also evolved their conversation-filled patterns to encompass what Cuban *batá* drummers call “*rumbitas*” (little *rumbas*) or *toques especiales* (special rhythms), and Yoruba *batá* drummers call social or dance rhythms. Thus, both Cuban and Nigerian *batá* drummers have evolved their respective traditions to encompass both ceremonial and social functions. In this sense, there are vocabulary and repertory affinities between Yoruba and Afro-Cuban *batá* that have led to an abstraction of conversational style both in pan-Latino percussion and piano solos. The conversational

aesthetic has thus abstracted the surrogate speech conversations from sacred ceremonial corpuses of Cuban salute rhythms for the *orishas* and Yoruba proverbs to more social dancing contexts. In a semiotic sense, this abstraction from ceremonial to social use of drum conversation has hinged upon Cuban and Latin secular percussionists abilities to divorce or autonomize specific phrases from surrogate speech and use them abstractly as musical motifs.

When Mario Allende distinguishes Changuito's playing from that of *conga* virtuosi Richie Flores and Pedrito Martínez, he means that the "talking" or "transmission" aesthetic takes the form of sparse phrasing. To this day, Cuban and Latin musicians will often exclaim, "Habla!" ("Talk!") during percussion solos, especially when percussionists employ sparse phrases. While reactions to virtuosity can often be boisterous, only sparse phrases inspire musicians and audience members to connect (figuratively rather than literally) to ancient West African drum languages and texts.

Although Allende's characterization of Changuito's "one note" bombshells may seem hyperbolic, I spent hours with him during my 1996 trip to Havana, heard him sitting in on *quinto* with Yoruba Andabo and enjoyed sparring with him at his home about *clave* placement against his drum kit creations, which sounded mysteriously similar to Clive Stubblefield's funky drum work with James Brown. Changuito was playful about these matters. Although his musical training was informal and although he still reads and writes

music with great difficulty, he has taught generations of Cuban conservatory-educated percussionists to “talk” on the drum.

What then does “talking” mean on the drumset, *timbales*, or *tumbadoras*, where surrogate speech is only abstractly relevant? If “talking” refers to sparse phrases in the style of West African speech utterances, how is that parallel kept alive in Cuba, two centuries after the last Yoruba-speaking slaves were brought to the island? As folkloric ceremonial aesthetics have been grafted on to contemporary popular music percussion instruments, we can hear an increased abstraction of drum text from literal surrogate speech to imitative speaking style full of cultural meaning and association, not from its performance context, performer or even the chosen instruments, but rather on an amorphous “talking” aesthetic.

This same surrogate speech or conversation aesthetic can be heard in Cuban popular music as early as 1920s *son*’s *bongo* elaborations, often imitating folkloric percussion’s timbres and phrases. However, since the piano is, at its heart, a percussion instrument, it may not be surprising that the West African-derived conversation aesthetic has migrated from sacred folklore, to popular percussion, and finally, to the piano solo. One can hear sparse piano solo phrases imitating the *quinto* (lead drum in *rumba*) as early as Arsenio Rodríguez’s first recording on September 12, 1940, of his composition “El Pirulero No Vuelve Mas” (“The Candyman Won’t Come Back Anymore”). Pianist Lino Frías uses the piano’s right and left hands to imitate low and high timbres on percussion

instruments such as the two *batá* heads, the larger and smaller *bongo* heads, the *conga*'s open tones and slaps, and the *cajón*'s various wooden surfaces. Other Cuban and Latin pianists, including Rubén González, Eddie Palmieri, Papo Lucca, Jorge Dalto, and Danilo Pérez have combined this conversation aesthetic with chromatic jazz harmonies and avant-garde tone clusters for an unmistakable sound conveying both historicity and modernity. It can be overtly heard in their piano solos during arrangement sections earmarked for this purpose, wherein the vocals and horns drop out and the bass and percussion assume deliberately accompanimental roles. Upon this sonic bed, Cuban/Latin pianists use chords in one or both hands, bass notes and treble octaves to simulate the registral timbres of the lead drum in *rumba* or the *batá* battery, often employing cross-rhythms, ternary subdivisions of the binary tactus, and the sparseness typical of *quinto* improvisation in *rumba* and *bongó* marking in *changüí*.¹⁰⁰

This simulation of surrogate speech in drum language, filtered through secular percussionists and harmonically adapted to the Latin piano solo is typical of the stylistic musical mixture processes that occur throughout Cuban music. The piano is neither an African nor creolized Cuban drum. It solos on Western harmonies that are far more chromatic than most African traditional music based on pentatonic and hexatonic scales. Although the musical context of the Latin piano solo is not overtly African, even the piano's behavior within that context can be unambiguously African. In so doing, Cuban/Latin piano solo style fuses specific stylistic elements and manual techniques from

¹⁰⁰ Lapidus, *Origins*.

the piano's classical literature, as well as aspects of jazz piano, with this African-derived surrogate speech aesthetic to form something unique, neither European nor West African, a Cuban aesthetic that has clearly resonated throughout Latin America and the rest of the world.

Musical mixture As "Fantasy"

In the sense that many musical mixtures within the Cuban/Latin popular music context are often abstract regarding the theorization of African musical genres as texts, Kofi Agawu writes:

In so far as they constitute complex messages rooted in specific cultural practices, the varieties of African music known to us today may be designated as text. While performing practice and audience participation vary according to genre, the activity of meaning construction remains essential to all participants. We only have to listen to the elaborate vocal polyphony of BaAka Pygmies, the polyrhythmic dance-drumming of Fon, Anlo-Ewe, or Yoruba, the horn ensembles of the Banda-Linda; or Zairean *soukous*, Nigerian *juju* and *fiji*, Ghanaian Highlife, South African *mbube*; or the compositions of Fela Sowande, Akin Euba, Ephraim Amu, and Joshua Uzoigwe to begin to appreciate the kinds of fantasies that music in motion elicits.¹⁰¹

Traditional African music is not normally described as contemplative art. It is thought rather to be functional. Functional music drawn from ritual, work, or play is externally motivated. Thus funeral dirges sung by mourners, boat-rowing songs sung by fishermen, lullabies performed by mothers, and songs of insult traded by feuding clans:

¹⁰¹ Kofi Agawu, "African Music as Text," *Research in African Literatures* 32 no.2 (Summer 2001): 8-16.

these utilitarian musics are said to be incompletely understood whenever analysis ignores the social or "extra-musical" context. This music is then contrasted with elite or art music, whose affinities with European classical music are for the most part unmediated. Such contemplative music is not tied to an external function. Although it is in principle consumed in a social setting, it demands nothing of its hearers save contemplation, meditation, or an active self-forgetting. According to this distinction, then, analysis of traditional music—which is sometimes generalized to encompass all African music—must always take into account the particular activity to which the music is attached, whereas analysis of European music, unburdened by attachment to external function, can concentrate on the music itself, its inner workings, and the life of its tones. It does not require a great deal of imagination to see that the distinction between functional and contemplative is deeply problematic.¹⁰²

Agawu's idea of "fantasies that bodies in motion elicit" is an ideal description. When Israel and Orestes López integrated famous Western classical themes into their *danzón* melodía sections atop the African-derived *cinquillo* base, the sounds themselves initially existed only as fantasy. Josá Luis "Changuito" Quintana's ability to fashion a new drumset vocabulary from the polyrhythms of *rumba*, *batá*, Abacua, and Palo drumming, he first had to hear in his mind some semblance of the sound he imagined.

Moreover, whereas this chapter's analytical model of affinity, antipathy, and necessity has not come preassembled in the words of the Cuban and Latin musicians with

¹⁰² Ibid.

whom I've worked and conducted research, our music's oral and written histories are full of examples of musical mixtures first existing as very private and personal fantasies leading to more publicly manifested creative impulses. Having felt the birthing process of affinity, antipathy, and necessity converging on a sonic argument, and later the sonic argument birthing a creative impulse to manifest it in living sound, I can well imagine how Los Van Van's founding pianist César Pedroso thought up a piano *tumbao* based on a *batá* rhythm. In Los Van Van's "La Lucha," the piano *tumbao* indeed faithfully replicates the *itótele*'s basic pattern in the somewhat generic *batá* rhythm *Chachalegpafún*, increasingly known as *Chachalokefún*. The piano *tumbao* over the progression I-IV-flat III in F-major uses the notes F and E-flat to simulate the *itótele*'s open tones and the double thirds A-C and B-flat-D to represent the *itótele*'s smaller *chachá* head.

"La Lucha's" piano *tumbao* thus embodies a sonic argument based on vocabulary, repertory and abstract procedural affinities between the *batá*'s different sized head and the piano's contrasting high and low registers. That timbral affinity leads to a repertory affinity in which the *batá* rhythm is melodized, which embodies an abstract procedure for applying folkloric percussion matrices to harmonic instruments such as the piano and bass.

Upon asking Cuban musicians what these borrowings, reinterpretations, and applications of musical elements into fresh new mixtures mean, many have used a

characteristic linguistic metaphor. In Cuban society, where so many languages, religions, and races mix, one thing means many different things. As *los Chinitos de Cuba* say, “Four people do two things; two people do three things, and five people do one thing. That is *guarapachangueo*: live, enjoy, and share. We were four brothers in music; *guarapachangueo* gave us the opportunity to express what we felt.” I have experienced these creative fantasies and imaginings throughout my musical formation and still experience them today. When I began applying variation techniques from north Indian *tabla qedas* to Changuito’s *songo marchas* for *conga*, the timbral and structural affinities I initially heard in my mind were indeed fantasies. Similarly, when I began noticing the parallels between *timba* piano *tumbao* elaboration strategies and those used by *tabla* players during the opening *peshkar* of the Indian classical *tabla* solo recitals, those parallels initially existed as my creative fantasies.

In 2003, in fulfillment of a disability-related performance grant from Philadelphia’s Painted Bride Arts Center, I invited my most esteemed percussionist colleagues and students from the Afro-Cuban and Hindustani classical traditions for a meeting of sounds and connections. In Audio Example 5.07, extracted from the concert’s second half, I applied the methodical variation procedures used for *table qedas* to a *songo* rhythm on *congas*, alternating with Radha Martinelli on *table* and Peter Faggiola on *pakhawaj*. I then applied various permutations and proportions to the Cuban *pilón* rhythm popularized by Pacho Alonso during the 1960s and 1970s. I used its *conga marcha* as a theme or subject for methodical variations, while Cuban drummer François

Zayas interacted with me using a modernized *pilón* groove on his drumkit. This section was framed by the *Lukumí batá* rhythm *iyankotá* for the *orisha* Babalu Ayé and a repeating melodic figure known as *nagma* or *lehera*, used to delineate the rhythmic cycle in Hindustani *tabla* recitals.

Reflections:

Musical Mixture and Interactive Semiotics

In order to reverse engineer musical mixtures and evaluate when and why they work, I have presented an analytical alternative to the often presumed causality between socioculture and musical behavior. I have revisited the idea of music as “language,” explored by theorists and aesthetic philosophers, including Leonard Meyer, Gerald Levinson, Eugene Narmour, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, and Kofi Agawu.¹⁰³ Broadly speaking, these theorists liken musical elements to vocabulary, syntax, and grammar in language. Just as language contains parts of speech, musical grammar contains pitches and durations functioning as describers, anticipators, prolongers, elaborators, paraphrasers, and many other lexical analogues. Musical systems likewise sonic and structural analogues to subjects, objects, and, in terms of discursive repetition, allusions to the past and future. Such analogues posit the idea that musical behaviors derive most of their meaning through musical grammar and syntax themselves, rather than through

¹⁰³ Leonard Meyer (1956, 1967, 1973, 1989); Jerrold Levinson (1990, 1996, 1997, 2006); Eugene Narmour (1990, 1992); Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Kofi Agawu (2003, 2009).

sociocultural phenomena. The daily decisions made by Cuban and Latin musicians, while practicing, recording, rehearsing and performing, address fundamental concepts such as implication, resolution, repetition, variation, motivic development, rhythmic proportion, and tonal teleology. However, unlike language, musical mixtures propose that seemingly unrelated or illogical lexical and syntactical elements can make abstract musical sense.

More concretely, the methods Cuban and Latin musicians use to embody their sonic choices with grammatical meaning suggest that musical behaviors are shaped by, and also shape, socioculture. Rather than being hierarchically causal or mutually exclusive, interactive semiotics suggests a constant give and take between the forces of culture and musical abstraction. As music travels, the raw materials and developmental processes change at different rates, at times in parallel, at other times, favoring one over the other.

Growing up in New York during the 1980s, musical mixture was a byproduct of cultural mixture. In the Latino-American musical scenes in various North American cities, Nuyoricans' and other Latinos' immigrant status often relegated them to marginal *barrios* (neighborhoods) teeming with crumbling tenements and barely functional infrastructure. Music always resonated in these *barrios*. I can remember hearing classic *salsa*, early hip hop, disco, *baladas*, and *merengue* blasting from boomboxes and car speakers of varying audio fidelity, sounds seasoning our communal air like the smells of sofrito, burning tires, and trash.

Growing up in this environment, the mashup was our way of life. We ate hot dogs with rice and beans. We used African-American and hip hop slang and Spanglish in the same sentences. We yearned for a cultural environment in which our Hispanic clashes with mainstream, largely white, American culture did not exist. To that end, we visited our non-Hispanic friends' houses, watched television with them, ate their food, and got to know their parents. They, in turn, visited our homes, ate our food, learned a few Spanglish words, and danced to our music. In this burgeoning multicultural environment, musical mixture seemed an inevitable byproduct of social, ethnic, and racial commingling. Yet, as more of us began forgetting Spanish (or never learning it at all), as our tropical islands became idealized memories rather than vivid landscapes, music became an important connector to our parents' and grandparents' worlds. Of course, as we rebelled against the strictures of our parents' worlds, we wanted and needed our favorite music to embody our blended and fused culture. During the 1960s, we began to wonder what would happen if we put a backbeat and soul slang refrains on top of *son montuno*'s "singing bass" lines, or how the strumming and picking patterns of our acoustic guitars and *cuatros* would sound when grafted onto the electric rock guitar. During the 1970s, we heard parallels between James Brown's funky vamps and our *montunos*, or use memorable percussion breaks to pepper neighborhood "hip hop" with our unmistakable flavor. In the 1980s, we used our most typical harmonic progressions and syncopated rhythmic figures on synthesizers and drum machines, pioneering the

short-lived “Latin hip hop” or “freestyle” genres, where mostly *Boricua* (Puerto Rican) singers made our records and the Mafia sold them to us at inflated prices.

During the 1990s, Sergio George revived and repurposed the languid careers of former freestyle singers La India, George Lamond, Brenda K. Star, and Mark Anthony. By the 2000s, Dominican *bachata* acquired a global sheen with artists such as Aventura, Romeo, and Prince Royce. But nothing could have prepared us or our world for *reggaetón*, a genre addictive to some and repellent to others, based around the Jamaican *dembo* or *cumina riddims* used in dancehall *reggae*.¹⁰⁴ Every famous *salsero* has tried their hand at *reggaetón*, using guest rappers such as Daddy Yankee or Tego Calderón, or rapping themselves.

Today’s young Latinos are not musically limited by what they hear blasting in their ‘hoods: they scour Youtube and Facebook just like most of the wired Western world. Yet, our ambivalence surrounding cultural preservation, assimilation, and fusion persists. We realize that every musical experiment is loaded with cultural associations and aesthetic values. Yet, like our Cuban counterparts fusing *orisha* songs and jazz, roots *reggae* with *son* or *reggaetón* with *rumba*, both sides are asking, “What if we try this on top of that? What if we made this behave like that?”

As creative people, musicians take leaps transcending cultural limits, blend existing musical resources with those we encounter outside our traditions. The speech

¹⁰⁴ Lewin 2000, Stolzoff 2000, Hope 2006, Manuel and Marshal.

style used by numerous Cuban instruments including the piano is indeed a musical manifestation of Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation, or Melville Herskovitz's concept of African retentions. The pianoforte's journey to Latin America and its acquisition of Africanized musical roles in Cuba demonstrate that instruments can acquire new playing techniques, gestures, and textures, just as human migration does.

Not only do people carry pitches and rhythms with them, pitches and rhythms have ways of appearing in different places without traceable stops on their journeys. We can therefore trace musical inheritance through sound, especially when there are gaps in individual musician lineages within the tradition.

It becomes clear that Western instruments such as the piano, guitar, violin, contrabass, flute, cornette, trombone, euphonium, and saxophone have been used to fulfill African ensemble roles, participating in gestures and textures unimagined by European art music composers. It is within this omnidirectional process of sonic musical mixture that the piano's place in Cuban, Latin, and other New World musical systems can best be understood. Piecing together this transnational, transtemporal musical mixture history, the analytical model elucidated in these pages may offer future Afro-diasporic music specialists a sound-centered way of talking about musical mixture, pinpointing exactly what happens, with which elements, on which instruments and for which purposes. The sounds are often the only fragile vestiges remaining of a past that no living musician recalls. Just as notated scores were once the only windows into historical musical

practices, we now have many ways of accessing and preserving high quality audio. We can become adept at sonic sleuthing, combining notated scores, historical recordings, film archives, and written accounts (wherever possible) to stitch together the narrative on musical mixture's different levels, using timbres, textures, gestures, rhythmic cells, melodic fragments, and harmonic progressions as protagonists playing markedly different roles during different historical periods and musical situations. Each sonic event can signify a genre's characteristic air or feel, a specific musician's inventiveness, a quotation from another genre or different tradition altogether, the adaptation/application of vocabularies from one instrument to another in a vehement sonic argument based on networks of affinities, antipathies, and necessities. If these sonic arguments make logical sense and catch on with musicians, dancers, and listeners, a singular creative impulse, a "what if" moment of speculative experimentation, can become an enduring translational, cross-cultural musical mixture that, translated from Juan Formell's lyrics, "te pone la cabeza mala," messes up your mind.

CHAPTER 6

Cuban Flavor:

Genre Consciousness in Latin Piano

Orlando: What, in your opinion, do non-Cubans lack in playing *timba*?

Richard: I think that, in my opinion, of course respectful of non-Cubans or non-Latin Americans, *timba* has to be born with someone. To be a *timbero*, someone has to have at least heard a bit of *rumba*, a bit of the Afro-Cuban thing, the thing that comes from when Cuba was a Spanish colony. Because, really, normally, *timba* comes from the street, from the ardor of Columbia and *guaguancó*, and all that. *Timba* as a genre didn't exist. What always existed were *son*, *guaracha*, *mambo*, and *chachachá*. None of those were called *timba*. *Timba* as a term was rooted in what Irakere did. You know that Irakere was a mixture fused from Afro-Cuban rhythms, *timba*, and jazz. Irakere was something very powerful and, during its time, very supernatural. Following Irakere, *timba* began being made: Irakere, NG la Banda, etc., etc. All that comes about, if you realize it, almost all of Irakere's *timba* tunes had their bits of *rumba* and *afro*.

Orlando: That is to say that one must have knowledge of Afro-Cuban folklore in order to understand *timba*'s rhythms.

Richard: And the effects that are done over *timba*, the breaks combined with bass and piano *tumbaos* and keyboard counter-*tumbaos*. A *tecladista* [synthesizer/keyboardist], even if they don't know how to play *rumba*, but have *la manana* [groove or swing], as we say, the *clave* resides in them, and they get into that flavor. All you have to do is write out those syncopations and the rhythmic approach. But if they don't have that feeling and don't analyze what they're playing, they won't get that *timba* sound.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Richard Ortega, interview with author, 19 August 2013.

Introduction

Years ago, when I lived and taught Latin piano in West Philadelphia, a student came to his regular weekly lesson with exciting news: he had landed his first Latin gig to be played the next week. Although this student had initially approached me wanting to learn Latin piano, I decided that he would be best served by a few months working on his jazz chops, which we did to great effect. For his first ever Latin gig, he resolved to play tunes from the Latin Realbook, which are only represented in lead sheet notation with the main melody, accompanying chord changes, and, when applicable, song lyrics. Upon hearing this news, I asked him to play one of these Latin Realbook offerings. In response, he played a very generic i-iv-V *guaracha tumbao* in a minor key, inappropriately full of damper pedal and with its accents entirely misplaced. Upon hearing this attempt, I was flabbergasted and speechless. I wanted to ask him why he thought it possible for a non-Hispanic, only vaguely familiar with Latin music, to accept and prepare for a Latin gig in a week. I even considered mentioning that he would have done better referring that Latin gig to me or another of the Philadelphia area's half a dozen competent Latin pianists. After an awkward silence, I gently reminded him that he did not learn jazz piano in a week and that no one would expect a classical instrumentalist to master a new instrument in such a short time. Further escalating this tense situation, he asked if I was willing to prepare him for this upcoming Latin gig, to which I responded with a categorical "impossible." This student never returned.

This incident has remained with me because of the problems it posed. Although I am a Caribbean-Hispanic, and although I was raised with a clear preference for Cuban music over other Latin forms, I was not “born with *timba*,” as Richard Ortega maintains. Although I can recall my father taking me to *rumbas* in various New York City neighborhood parks as a small child, I only vaguely remember which subgenres of *rumba* were played. I certainly did not learn the vital differences between yambú, guaguancó and *rumba* Columbia until adolescence, when I also began studying *batá* and other folkloric drumming with John Amira. By the time I joined my father’s Orquesta Corazón in 1986, I was dimly aware that his music, though made in New York, was quite unlike standard-issue *salsa*, especially pertaining to the piano’s relationship to the bass and *tres* (Cuban guitar). My first exposure to hard-core Cuban *timba* was probably in 1997 at La Esquina Habanera in Union City, New Jersey, where I was playing *rumba* with a folkloric group. It was on our set breaks that I first heard Paulo FG’s “La Especulación de la Habana” and Manolito Simonet’s “Marcando la Distancia.” I knew that this new Cuban music sounded different from any traditional genre, especially in terms of piano *tumbaos*’ departures from generic patterns. I also knew that in order to master this new *timba* thing, I would have to simulate in some way the genre background with which most Cuban *timba* pianists come prepared. I knew that this familiarization process would not happen via osmosis, since I was surrounded by non-Cuban Latin music, with Cuban groups only making occasional trips to the U.S. on short-term visas and studio recordings still largely unavailable.

I nonetheless intuited that, just as previous generations of Cuban and non-Cuban Latin pianists alike familiarized themselves with various popular music genres through recordings and bandstand training, I could do the same. But I first had to unravel what I thought constituted Cuban popular music genres, what I was told by various musicians constituted them, how that knowledge dovetailed with recording liner notes, and most important, what the piano's role in each genre actually is. These seemingly simple issues have taken two decades to attempt to answer, during which time, I've fortunately been the recipient of many musicians' record collections and personally delivered insights.

Genres

Having outlined the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, gestural, textural, and timbral ingredients that Cuban/Latin piano has inherited from the Western classical, Afro-Cuban folkloric, jazz, and other Afro-Diasporic popular musics in the previous chapters, and having touched upon a few of the theoretical procedures most relevant to Cuban/Latin piano, we can now turn to the exploration of genres across various styles and epochs of Latin music in which the pianist participates, sometimes contributing signature patterns, other times commenting on repertoire features, and often interacting with other instruments in the ensemble to forge a dynamically interlocking and responsive rhythm section model.

Genres are the musical intersections between the aforementioned vocabularies, repertoires and even abstract procedures. Genres also tend to be breeding grounds for

musical mixture of all sorts, from one-off mashups to entirely new genres. Yet, when defining and delineating genres in terms of Cuban/Latin piano, a number of problems arise. Cuban folkloric and popular music genres can be classified according to at least half a dozen variables: original regionality, instrumentation, ensemble types and roles, song forms, average tempi, rhythmic cadence, and adherence to *clave* principles. Certain genres, such as the aforementioned *son* and *guaracha*, began as specific historical types with characteristic ensembles, and have now evolved (or devolved) into abstractions.

The Instrumental Schema

One rubric for defining Cuban folkloric and popular music genres is instrumentation. Most ceremonial contexts serving Cuba's *Lukumí*, Arará, Carabalí, and Congo spiritual traditions are inextricably associated with specific drums, each possessing unique design features, names, and repertoires. Perhaps most famous of these are the hourglass-shaped Yoruba-derived *batá*, played in a group of three and employing specific *toques* (rhythms) for each *orisha* (Yoruba-derived spirit or deity). Yet, when comparing Cuban *Lukumá* and Nigerian Yoruba *batá*, the Cuban *batá* corpus contains songs and rhythms associated with non-Yoruba people and spiritual traditions, including Iyesá, Eguado, and Arará. If the *batá* communicate directly with the *orishas*, what are they saying when accompanying an Arará or even *congo* song? Social folkloric genre classification by instrumentation or ensemble type is equally problematic. Comparsa uses bass and snare drums, cowbells, frying pans, and a reed instrument called *la trompeta*

china (Chinese trumpet). Yet the Cuban-exported 1940s *conga* craze outside of Cuba could only hope to simulate all the drum and bell parts.

Traditional *rumba* uses combinations of *cajones*, *congas* and *claves*, with the highest drum, the *quinto*, marking dance steps, filling in vocal silences and soloing. Yet Arsenio Rodríguez's iconic *guaguancoces de salón*, crafted for his 1940s-1950s *conjunto* ensemble, used none of the emblematic *rumba* patterns or the characteristic *quinto*.¹⁰⁶ Rather, the *quinto* function was grafted on to the bongo and the vocal *dianas* (opening tonal setup improvisations) were taken up either by vocal choruses, the three-trumpet section or even the piano. *Charangas* are characterized by an ensemble containing flute, violins, optional cello, piano, bass, *conga*, *timbales* and *güiro*. This typical *charanga* ensemble type derived from the *orquesta francesa*, a quieter version of the *orquesta típica*'s *bombardini*, trombones, clarinets, and cornettes. Against this backdrop, Juan Formell's earliest instrumentation of Los Van Van was considered a modified *charanga*, substituting drum kit for the *timbales* and augmenting the harmonic section with electric guitar, electric bass, and various electric keyboards such as Fender Rhodes and Farfisa organ. To this day, Elio Revés's *charangon* (huge *charanga*), now led by his son, Elito, contains neither flute nor bowed strings: these are replaced by three trombones. *Conjunto* ensembles usually consist of piano, bass, optional *tres*, *conga*, bongo, trumpets and vocalists doubling on *maracas* and *claves*. Yet, the *conjunto* sound is meant to be audible

¹⁰⁶ García, *Black Cuban Musician and Transnational Flows*.

even in ensembles such as New York *salsero* Eddie Palmieri's La Perfecta Combinación, with a two-trombone brass section and the *bongocero* doubling on *timbales*.

More recently, the prototypical *timba* ensemble consists of piano and *teclado* (synthesizer keyboards), bass, *congas*, drum kit and *timbales*, mixed horn sections of trumpets, trombones and saxophones, lead and backing vocalists. Yet, I have heard *timba* bands containing only a single trumpet or trombone. Pedrito Martínez's quartet uses no horns, drum kit, or *timbales*. However, its bass and percussion gear structures and dropouts to solo piano *tumbaos* flag it as pure *timba*.

Ensemble Roles

Another genre rubric revolves around ensemble roles, wherein characteristic repeating patterns and solo matrices are expected of specific instruments within the ensemble. In many cases, either the instruments or their roles are modified, without affecting the genre's integrity. For instance, in the traditional *rumba* ensemble, the lower supporting *cajones* or *congas* play a subordinate role to the *quinto*'s lead. Yet in the *guarapachangueo* style of *rumba* popularized by Los Chinitos and Yoruba Andabo, the lower supporting *cajones* and *congas* converse independently of the *quinto*, and the sonic palette is expanded to include multiple *congas* and *batá* drums on a stand, played by a single player.

Taking another example, *son* relegates ostinato playing to the *tres*, possesses a specific *clave* orientation and is most traditionally performed by sextets or septets

containing *tres*, rhythm guitar, acoustic bass, bongo, two vocalists doubling on *maracas* and *claves* and a solo trumpet. Given *son*'s characteristic *tres guajeos* and bass *tumbaos* based on the *tresillo* (3-side) of the *clave*, what then is "son-like" about Arsenio's *conjunto* sound including piano, *tumbadora* (low conga) and three trumpets, or later, Adalberto Álvarez's instrumentation including trumpets and trombones, *timbales*, synthesizers, and electronic drums?

Mambo, as a genre, is defined by layered and interlocking syncopated rhythmic cells. What then is the common *mambo* thread running through Antonio Arcaño's *mambo* sections at the end of typical *charanga francesa danzones*, Arsenio Rodríguez's *diablo* sections and the layered big band layerings of brass and reeds in Presé Prado and Bebo Valdés arrangements? For another problematic case, the rural *changüí* family of genres in Guantánamo delegates the large *bongó del monte* to a lead function similar to the *quinto* in *rumba*. In numerous interviews and documentaries, the *bongocero* Taberas from Grupo Í de Guantánamo likens his phrases to the *quinto* in *rumba*, explaining that he innovated these phrases over the simpler traditional matrix used by informally-trained *changuiceros*. Thus, not only does Taberas perceive a vital link between *changüí*'s *bongo de monte* and *rumba*'s *quinto*, he is also proud of his innovations within the *changüí* genre. Analogously, Juan Formell, founder of Los Van Van and a native *guantanamero*, grew up around *changüí*. It is therefore no accident that his *songo* was highly syncopated, making use of the same cadential phrases as *changüí*.

All these questions grapple with the linkage of genres to specific instrumentations. There is clearly a space in which *son* can be played with piano rather than *tres*, or *mambo* can be implied without the brass and reed sections of a jazzband. Clearly, the air (*el aire*) of both *rumba quinto* and *changüí's bongó del monte* can be evoked virtuosically by Los Van Van's longest running percussionist, José Luis "Changuito" Quintana, particularly during a now legendary extended *timbal* solo for "Tumba Tumba No Me Vuelvo A Buscar," recorded live in 1986 for East German Radio.

Tempo Range

Another common genre classification schema is average tempo or tempo range. It is particularly useful for performing situations in which different genres are ideally counterbalanced by contrasting tempi. Especially in non-Cuban or touristic settings where one ensemble must fulfill the needs of different dancing contingents, the classification of genres by average tempo is quite useful. I can recall hundreds of performances with Philadelphia's *Charanga la Única*, under the musical direction of legendary Cuban flutist and violinist Felix "Pupy" Legarretta, during which a fast *guaracha* would be followed by a slower *chachachá* or an even slower *bolero*. These contrasting tempo schemas are clearly evident on New York Latin recordings from the 1940s to the late 1960s, where genres such as *bolero*, *mambo*, or *guaracha* were included beside each track title. Yet, even average tempo ranges can confuse more than they clarify. *Guaguancó*, *changüí* and *songo* all share an average tempo range between 120

and 140 beats per minute. On the slower side, *bolero*, *chachachá*, and *guajira* all share an average tempo range between 40 and 80 beats per minute (bpm).

To compound matters, many genres related by tempo range were not always thusly intertwined. The average tempi for contemporary *guaguancó* and *rumba Columbia* (120-150 bpm.) was much wider in past decades, with *guaguancó* decidedly slower than *rumba Columbia*. The average *danzón* tempo (100-120 bpm) as late as the 1920s, slowed down from the 1930s to the present, to the point that Cuban *charangas* take pride in ensemble precision in glacially slow *danzones*. Perhaps the slowest I've ever heard on recording is Orquesta Aragón's "Un Real de Hielo" probably recorded in the early 1950s, as evinced by the mono recording and single microphone used for all the instruments.

In other instances, average tempo facilitated the assimilation of new genres into Cuba's popular music panoply. Percussionist Roberto Borrel has explained to me that Arsenio Rodríguez's 1940s-1950s *son montunos* were danced with two types of footwork, the syncopated *contratiempo son* step documented in David García's 2006 monograph of Arsenio Rodríguez and the *chachachá* step in the genre pioneered by violinist and composer Enrique Jorrín.¹⁰⁷ Dancing the *chachá* step in *son montuno* enabled dancers to synthesize familiar and unfamiliar syncopations using footwork from genres sharing an average tempo, depending on tactus, of 50-70 bpm.

With the advents of radio, television, digital recording, and limited internet, another genre classification schema, rural versus urban, has become blurred beyond

¹⁰⁷ Roberto Borrel, interview with author, 2013; García, *Transnational Flows*.

recognition. Most of today's top bands employ musicians from Cuban provinces such as Las Tunas, Las Villas, Santiago, and Guantánamo, forcing urban genres to assimilate rural components, and in turn obliging rural musicians to assimilate to urban life. There has always been a back-and-forth interaction between rural and urban music styles. For instance, Arsenio Rodríguez's 1958 album *Primitivo*, recorded in New York City, consisted of exclusively rural sones and *guarachas*, recorded with only two trumpets and no piano. Conversely, the popular *guajiro* artists Los Compadres, Guillermo Portabales, Ramón Velos and the great Joséito Fernández, popularizer of the Guantanamera, all came from urban Habanero rather than rural provincial backgrounds.¹⁰⁸

Characteristic Rhythmic Patterns

A more clearcut genre classification schema takes characteristic rhythmic patterns as its departure point. It is from this schema that the Latin music world receives and perpetuates concepts such as “*rumba clave*” or the “anticipated bass.”¹⁰⁹ *Rumba clave*'s syncopated third pulse [X00x 000x 00x0 x000] clearly demarcates its genre affiliation, many Cuban pre-*timba* and *timba* bands interchange *rumba* and *son claves*, depending on the syncopation of vocal, harmonic instrument or brass lines. Nonetheless, when anyone stands in front of a Cuban audience exhorting dancers to clap *la clave cubana* (the Cuban *clave*), *rumba clave* is the intended outcome.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Manuel, “The Saga of a Song: Authorship and Ownership in the Case of Guantanamera,” *Latin American Music Review* 27 no.2 (2006): 121-147.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Manuel, “The Anticipated Bass in Cuban Popular Music,” *Latin American Music Review* 6 no.2 (1985).

The oft-cited anticipated bass, on the 2& and 4 pulses in 4/4 time, is used in a multitude of genres including modern *son*, *guaracha*, *mambo*, *salsa*, and *timba*. The same applies for the *güiro*'s characteristic rhythmic cell [X0xx x0xx], the *campana* (cowbell) pattern [X0xx x0xx x0x0 x0xx] or the *contracampana* bell pattern [X0x0 xxxx 0xxx x0xx]. The standard *conga marcha* (also called *tumbao*) is used for *son*, *guaracha*, *mambo*, *son montuno*, and *salsa*. The piano *guajeo* using the rhythmic cell: [X0xx 0x0x 0x0x 0x0x] is a cornerstone of *guaracha*, *mambo*, and *salsa*. The bongo marking matrix for *son* is also used in *boleros*, *guarachas*, and the verse sections of *salsa* and *timba* arrangements.

The association of genres with characteristic rhythmic patterns has obvious positive and negative ramifications. On the positive side, such patterns make Cuban-based popular genres almost instantly recognizable to culturally-aware dancers and listening audiences alike. These characteristic patterns often serve as entrés such as those of my aspiring piano student opening this chapter. Yet, for each case of these characteristic patterns, Cuba and her musical diaspora have moved beyond stock patterns, either with copious variations or the introduction of new patterns. The aforementioned anticipated bass was first expanded by Arsenio Rodríguez as early as 1943, on the song “Mi China Ayer Me Botó,” in favor of the song-specific “sing bass” (*bajo cantado*), which emphasized the *son montuno*'s dance footwork and infused bass lines with mostly diatonic chord tones and passing notes in contrast to the tonic, dominant, and

subdominant functions outlined in the typical anticipated bass. Arsenio's singing bass took on new life among U.S. Latinos in genres such as *Pachanga* and *boogaloo*.

By the early 1970s, Juan Formell's bass lines for Los Van Van borrowed blue notes and syncopations from psychedelic rock and soul. By 1989, Feliciano Arango, bassist for NG La Banda, only sparingly returned to the classic anticipated bass *tumbao* on harmonically and rhythmically key cadential pulses. During a 2013 telephone interview, pioneering *timba* pianist Iván "Melón" Lewis rhapsodized about NG La Banda as follows:

Orlando: What were the circumstances that produced *timba*, not just in Cuba generally, but during and after the Special Period in the 1990s? In the seventies and eighties, there was Cuba, but no *timba*. During and after the Special Period, Cuba seemed ripe for *timba*.

Melón: For that, we have to mention an individual and a group that for me, was the breakdown, the person who flipped the switch that concretely, because of what he did, revolutionized everything. Independent of that, before then, there was another group that I'm also going to mention, that planted the seed. In the 1980s, Cuban dance music was clearly being made, 1980, or in the late 1970s, Irakere comes out. 'Damn! This is out of sight! What is this?' Irakere, basically Chucho, took some of his colleagues from the Música Moderna ensemble, who were restless young bucks like Carlitos del Puerto, etc. So, these musicians were for him the hardest pumpers on their instruments. Pum, Pum, Pum, Pum, he brought out Irakere. What did Irakere do? Irakere mixed and started to combine Afro-Cuban music with jazz! Pure and hard! The brass section were the foremost performers and interpreters on their respective instruments: Arturo Sandoval, Varona, all those guys, had a wickedly amazing playing capacity. Those guys could play everything, and Chucho was of course a pianist's pianist on a very high level. Damn, if you have the capacity to play a hellified instrument, the ideas that occur to you are of a very high level, in accordance with your capability. So then, those ideas are inherently on a high level. So Chucho took advantage of the fact that everyone could really play and the brass would play 'pa!' a bunch of stuff. Now and then, there would be a danceable piece, but maintaining the capacity of a danceable Cuban ensemble, but doing more daring things, and suddenly, 'This piece is not for dancing; this is for listening to how we sound, let's say, the

concept of a big band.' But it carried the music, and 'pun pun,' Chucho plants the seed.

But for me, for me, honestly, the person who said 'This is *timba*!' is named José Luis González *el toscó*. That dude, what he did, was the same, in a manner of speaking, the same as Chucho did with Irakere, but now with NG la Banda. But he brought and focused it concretely, absolutely and directly, on danceable music.

What happens? Well What happens is what I was just saying, especially in my case, that yes, we're going to make danceable music, but people, but we're fantastic; we play our asses off on a very high level.

So then, naturally, Feliciano Arango, how that man plays bass, it's impossible for him to play a bass line [sings standard issue anticipated bass]. He can't play like that. He can't! He can't! It would be a waste, notwithstanding the fact that there are people who like it or people who don't; that's another story. But he has to play using all that musical capability that he has, all those ideas! So then, José Luis Cortés gathered up all that musical torrent from all those musicians and he put it directly in the function of danceable music. Because yes, he had, in every concert, two or three *songs* so that the dancing public could see, 'Damn! We're gonna play a concert for folks to dance, but look, we can also do this.'

But it was one or two songs. The rest were songs for people to dance. What happened? That was very innovative, very very innovative. And the public arrived at a collective and historical social realization during the early 1990s. I still don't know for what reason, perhaps because of everything from before, having heard Oscar de León, having heard Irakere, having heard Juan Formell and Los Van Van, doing that mixture of pop/rock, albeit from a Cuban vantage point, when NG La Banda came, the Cuban public was perfectly prepared for it. Perfectly prepared for that music! Far from being frightened, far from being at concerts, wondering 'What what are these people playing? What the hell are they playing?' Far from that! They understood it perfectly from the first, they danced to it and assimilated it.

And as a result of that, it was like, the musicians, even kids during that time, of which I was one, when I heard NG La Banda's first record, I was like, 'What da fuck, *meng!*' What's this? Where did this music come from, man? What is this? Because, for me, it was night and day. They had already been rehearsing and performing concerts here and there, but suddenly, a record comes into my hands; it's NG la Banda, and I'm like, 'What's this, brother? Where did this dude get all this from? What's this?'

Yes yes! There would be a piano *tumbao* and then a long *mambo*. As a musician, or a music student, I'd say, 'Damn! Look look look at this phrase that's so good!'

But then all of a sudden, the piano *tumbao* would break out again and I'd say, 'Yeah, but this is also great for dancing!' And it's Cuban, one hundred percent Cuban. What José Luis Cortés and NG la Banda did during the 1990s was, when they came out, in my particular case, was *theeeeeee* influence.

Now, I'm tired of seeing *el Tosco*. Fortunately later, I think I was able to put myself on his level and we shared the stage many many times and made studio recordings. And all the time, he'd say to me, 'Kid! When are you going to come to our rehearsals? When are you going to join my band?' Man, life is really something! If you would have told me that ten years ago, I would have had a stroke.

So I would tell him, 'But I'm your product! I'm a consequence of you! You don't know how much I'd listen to every break Calixto played on your records!' That forms part of my life's formation. So, responding to what you asked, that's why I say, in my opinion, that's why I say, from my perspective, of course respecting what historians and scholars have written, the phenomenon that opened the door, aside from Irakere planting the seed, because these NG musicians (*el Tosco*, *Jermán*, etc.) also passed through Irakere, the one who truly gave birth to what is known today as *timba*, Cuba's most sophisticated aggressive dance music, for me, that's the work of José Luis Cortés and NG La Banda.

I recall my initially different reactions to NG, having first bought one of their CDs at a London record shop while on tour with my father. Like *Melón*, I went crazy over *el Tosco*'s jazzy horn writing, his virtuosic flute playing, pianist Rodolfo Peruchín's rhythmically displaced *tumbaos* and Feliciano Arango's funkified bass playing. However, I also remember thinking that there was no way that people actually danced to this. At that time, NG's music, like Irakere's, seemed ideal for concerts full of attentive listeners, but too much was going on for any dancer to find their footing. Many New York *salseros*, including my father, branded the music as excessively cluttered and jazzy, too far afield from the traditional Cuban genres we loved.¹¹⁰

These critiques of NG la Banda have likewise been leveled against most subsequent Cuban *timba*: that they're too blatantly virtuosic, cluttered, jazzy, and, worst of all, obscuring of the *clave*.

What could be afoot here? Besides the obvious cultural differences between the "perfectly prepared" 1990s Cuban public and a bunch of New York *salseros* who were

¹¹⁰ Iván "Melón" Lewis, interview with author, 24 September 2013.

comparatively behind Cuba's musical curve, there is also a fundamental difference involving the elasticity of genres. For NG's detractors, el Tosco had stretched the boundaries of Cuban dance music further than the tradition could tolerate. Too many integral elements demarcating Cuban popular music genres was being tossed aside. These conservatory graduates created a music ideal for showing off their virtuosity, but not at all ideal for dancing. Worst of all, Irakere, Los Van Van, NG la Banda and other post-Revolution Cuban groups, were viewed through out the Latin American musical diaspora as having abandoned every musical element comprising Cuban flavor. Years later, after having immersed myself in Cuban *timba* and assimilated changes in folkloric genres involving nonliteral repetition, I began to wonder whether the true essence of Cuban flavor is in fact this elasticity, this stretching of musical vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures beyond traditional limits, always capable of returning to that tradition in an instant, with the perfect break landing on the ponche, the perfectly traditional cadence to a trumpet solo, the perfect combination of history, tradition, and innovation in a piano *tumbao* or solo.

Thus far, we have encountered the problematic genre classifications according to instrumentation, ensemble roles, average tempo ranges and characteristic rhythmic cells. Perhaps all these classificatory schemas are getting something fundamentally wrong. Perhaps Cuba's musical genres are better conceived as containing vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures that can be freely exchanged, permuted, recombined, and transferred to other instruments. Each genre has a unique genome comprising typical

ingredients: melodic phrases, and rhythmic cells, harmonic progressions, average tempo range, and instrumentation. But in addition, these genres contain secret revitalization recipes. Perhaps the way to keep classic *son* relevant is to blend in jazz harmonies and larger brass sections. Perhaps a slower *danzón* tempo provides more contrast to *chachachás* and guarachas within the *charanga* complex. Perhaps *changüí quantamero* takes on new popularity when infused into an amplified ensemble with baby bass, sampled piano, trombones, *congas* and drum kit. Perhaps the mere act of reinterpreting *trova santiaguera* using stereo digital recording technology, as did the Buena Vista franchise, allows that music to remain active, rather than consign it to the proverbial musical museum of the dead past.

Stasis, Change, and Genre

Rather than instrumentation, average tempo range, characteristic rhythmic patterns or ensemble roles, another encompassing feature of Cuban music resides in a simpler, yet more abstract realm. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, some core instrumental patterns things must remain constant, while others can change. How much stasis or change each element can tolerate is the alchemy of genre musical mixture. Too little and the genre is consigned to dusty record bins and elderly musician memories. Too much and the genre loses its identity. By observing genre characteristics and changes over time, we can piece together the recipe for keeping each genre healthy and relevant. Applying this model of quantitative and qualitative observation over time, we may

observe that a lot can happen in *rumba* as long as the *clave* and *guagua* remain constant. *Son* and *guaracha* can sound recognizable if elements such as the characteristic *conga* *marcha*, piano and bass *tumbaos*, *guiro*, and *campana* patterns remain close to their traditions, with only minor variations. However, we also realize that Arsenio Rodríguez's *son montuno* can withstand big band arrangements full of intricate chromaticisms and extended jazz harmony, as long as its characteristic syncopated footwork is audible in the bass, *conga*, and *bongo*, and as long as song-specific piano and *tres guajeos* provide audible connectors between these instrumental parts and vocal refrains. We may observe that the *bolero* is one of Latin America's most elastic genres for good reasons. It can be interpreted by serenading guitarist/vocalists, *son* septets, *charangas* with flute and strings, large jazzbands with brass and reeds, solo voices, duos, and choirs.

Applying our previously discussed quantitative musical mixture paradigm to both traditional and hybrid genres, musical elements can be placed on appropriately similar or different analytical levels. Rather than consider a genre in terms of its instrumentation or average tempo, we can instead consider it based on which melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and timbral elements must remain in its vocabulary, and which other vocabulary elements can be varied, altered, or replaced. For the non-Cuban musician or enthusiast searching for the recipes for Cuban flavor, as well as Cuban and Latin musicians or scholars seeking paradigms for Cuban flavor's vitality, the genre elasticity model can finally clarify more than confound.

The term *sabor* (flavor) in Cuban music often takes on culinary or textile metaphors. Musicians work with musical ingredients in a way similar to the way chefs work with flavors and textures, or how clothing designers work with fabrics and colors. Yet, whereas most of the pertinent ingredients in cooking or clothing design are concrete, music's ingredients are both ontologically abstract and concrete. A pianistic gesture or texture obviously manifests with fingers depressing keys at various rhythmic times and at different dynamic levels. But the meanings of those seemingly mechanical events are assigned and interpreted by both the cultural and aesthetic frameworks in which the musical tradition is situated. For Eugene Narmour, these rubrics of performance practices and associated significances constitute taxonomies of *traditions* and *conventions*. Within each genre, musical choices and behaviors are traditional and conventional in historical terms, but there is also usually room for innovation in at least one area. Genres therefore tend to be sufficiently elastic or malleable to accommodate a certain amount of tradition/convention stretching. There is no substitute for trial and error in the process of determining how much stretching a given musical parameter within a genre can withstand before the composite genre identity is compromised.

In the following sections, I examine specific genres in terms of their elemental elasticity, analyzing stasis and change in terms of the very same elements that were hitherto so problematic: characteristic instrumentation, rhythmic patterns, tempo, song forms, etc. But here, rather than use these categories to prescribe and denote Cuba's folkloric and popular music genres, I use them parametrically to gage each genre's

elasticity and to pinpoint exactly where those pockets of elasticity in each genre reside, on which instruments, for which melodic fragments, atop which harmonic progressions, according to which rhythmic rules of stress and cadence.

In subsequent chapters, this model will reveal new ways of framing issues of authenticity and “cubaneo” in contemporary pan-Latin genres such as *timba*, *salsa* and Latin jazz. The quest for *cubaneo* can be finally disentangled from identity politics of Hispanic identity and ethnicity, focusing instead on purely musical elements that can be learned or unlearned, adopted, adapted or discarded, according to what each genre can demonstrably tolerate.

I further situate the piano as one of the few instruments in the Cuban/Latin transnational orchestra that by its very nature transcends kneejerk genre associations. Being an outsider to many traditional Cuban genres, the piano and pianists are free to imagine how this instrument can function: delicately or forcefully, using single notes or octaves, diatonically or chromatically, percussively in an Afro-Diasporic sense or in a funky jazzy sense. The piano is free to vary and improvise, to reharmonize or simply repeat, to sound an almost vocal singing tone or thunder using more pitches and registers than the average big band can muster. It is this simultaneous grounding in tradition, reinvention, and plasticity that defines *cubaneo* in Latin piano.

CHAPTER 7

Nengón Across Latin Music Genres:

A Case Study

Introduction

I recently phoned my father to ask him about the opening piano *guajeo* (ostinato) on his song, "Tan Aragón," track 6 on his self-produced 2012 album, *Ciudadano del Mundo*. I asked whether he knew that his opening was based off of the *nengón tres* motif recognized as its own genre by rural Cubans from eastern provinces. He answered: "I never heard of that. I just heard that figure in my head and that's how it came out. The rest is, I guess, coincidence."¹¹¹

My father is not that different from many Latin musicians who draw on Latin musical figures, like the *nengón*, in performing their music without knowing the identities or origins of the genre remnants they employ. This case study defines the *nengón* motif's characteristics as well as their elasticity and resilience as they are transformed from a concrete genre marker in its rural origins to a musical device in a variety of styles across place. I suggest that this transformation is facilitated by using variation techniques such as repeated-note decoration, rhythmic simplification, and displacement/rotation. I pay particular attention to the clavecization and harmonic expansion processes. While examining *nengón* I also contend that the *nengón*'s application to Cuban and Latin genres

¹¹¹ Henry Fiol, interview with the author, 28 February 2013.

by Latin musicians is emblematic of similar processes by which stylistic features from one Latin genre are grafted on to another.

Sound-Centered Analytical Methodology

In order to trace the *nengón* motif across traditional Cuban genres and pan-Latino *salsa*, this case study closely analyzes fourteen audio examples, which I have excerpted and narrated in real time. The narration serves two purposes.

First, since most of these examples are recordings of ensembles, my audio narration provides micro- and macro-analyses of ensemble performances that would take up too much space to notate. Each example is situated against the downbeat and clave. Each example is also sectionally outlined, with its harmony verbally synchronized with the music in the narration.

Second, my audio narration demonstrates how I listen to and analyze this music methodologically, using no notated scores. This methodological approach to sound-centered analysis helps me identify and keep track of different instruments, rhythmic figures, harmonic progressions and melodic nuances through the sounds themselves rather than through notation. This chapter is therefore both a case study of *nengón* across Cuban/Latin music genres, as well as a case study in my sound-centered analytical methodology.

Examples 7.1-7.4 demonstrate the *nengón* motif's rotational relationship to the *cinquillo* pattern. Examples 7.5-7.7 demonstrate traditional *nengón* using rural field

recordings. Examples 7.7-7.10 demonstrate the clavecized *nengón* motif from its traditional form, through foundational Cuban genres: *son*, *son montuno*, and *descarga* (jam session), using remastered historical commercial studio recordings. Examples 7.11-7.14 demonstrate the *nengón* motif in pan-Latino, mostly New York-based *salsa* studio recordings.

Tracking Genre Elements

In my quest to craft an analytic rubric for tracking musical elements involved in different genres, I have found it imperative to learn to track different genre elements, both on intra- and inter-genre levels. Just as linguists have developed analytical systems to track vowel and consonant changes in the phonemes and morphemes of related languages, Cuban popular genres evince systematic alteration, variation, and evolution processes wherein different musical elements "travel" across idiomatic instrumental vocabularies, ensemble types, and ultimately, genres themselves. Using this pseudo-linguistic paradigmatic approach to Cuban musical genres, we have thus far examined traditional Cuban genres and their diasporic Latin offshoots using various classificatory schemas: regional origins, instrumentation, average tempo, ensemble association, as well as characteristic melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic patterns. We have seen that the "real world" application of these paradigms introduces more exceptions than rules. Within Cuba's popular music traditions, genres are actually identified by a myriad markers, with all the above paradigms competing for primacy, depending on the musicians' typical roles

and self-interests. These debates largely revolve around the identification of foreground, middleground, and background elements expressed by voices, percussion, harmonic, and melodic instruments.

As the preceding chapter discusses, Cuban/Latin music exhibits a multitude of rich ways in which genres can be demarcated. In addition to instrumentation, average tempo, typical harmonic progressions and gestural/textural repertoires, Cuban/Latin genres are often represented by specific styles of piano and bass tumbaos. The conversation aesthetic discussed in Chapter 5 can be applied to intra and inter genre dialogues between different ensemble instruments. As this case study demonstrates, the *nengón* motif represents both a specific rural genre as well as an often obscure reference to that genre in other contexts.

When a Cuban/Latin musician decides what to play at any given moments, calculations are made on three levels: (1) existing genre traditions and expectations, (2) composed and notated arrangements, and (3) individual creativity through variation and improvisation. These three levels frame the prototypical musical decisions that skilled players make according to their understanding of their roles in articulating genre or specificity. The roles of harmonic instruments such as piano and bass are constantly changing between foreground, middleground, and background, depending upon expectations of genericism or specificity. For instance, the densely chromatic and virtuosic piano filagree used to accompany *boleros* are considered middle ground style intended to complement the vocal melody rather than distract attention from it. Yet, this

filagree is never notated and is expected to change in both content and character from performance to performance. Therefore, although *bolero* accompaniment does not usually involve stock or fixed patterns, its ornate style rests entirely within the pianist's stored vocabularies, repertoires and abstract procedures. In other cases, such as *chachachá*, *guaguancó de salón* and this case study of the *nengón* motif, specific piano *guajeos* or *tumbaos* represent entire genres, even when not specifically notated or indicated in written arrangements. These *guajeos* or *tumbaos* are often foregrounded, as in *timba's* *presión* gear, which breaks down the bass and percussion in order to showcase the piano *tumbao*. However, in more traditional genres, specific gestures, and textures appear in unexpected places. Thus, particular rhythmic, melodic or harmonic motifs encode and transport musical information across genres.

Demonstrating this principle, most participants in Cuban/Latin musical culture can recognize *chachachá* by its signature chordal piano *tumbao*, or *timba* by its characteristic tendencies toward a steady left hand and highly syncopated melodic phrases, with the pianist rather than the arranger using idiomatic vocabularies to transmit relevant messages, often spontaneously through improvisation and always in real time. But here, a different question is at play: if the *nengón* motif is largely subconsciously perceived outside of its indigenous rural context, what message does its sound send? I suggest that the *nengón* motif conveys cross-genre continuity: rurality to urbanity, home to diaspora, past to present temporal continua in Cuban music history, and references to musical figurations considered to be timeless or classic.

Three Points of Departure

This section focuses on a single rhythmic figure, known as *la figuración nengónica* (*nengón* figure), following its winding geographical journey from rural Guantánamo to Havana, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and New York City. In order to trace this journey the points of departure are threefold:

- (1) The *nengón* motif itself is rotationally related to the *cinquillo* and amphibrach rhythmic cells.
- (2) The *nengón* motif, although traditionally linked to supporting vocal refrains, percussion patterns and dance steps in its rural context, has achieved autonomy and cross-genre mobility.
- (3) Throughout its journey across Cuban/Latin popular music genres, the *nengón* motif has become increasingly abstracted, clavecized, and harmonically expanded, to be used as a songwriting/arranging vocabulary component.

Historical Overview

By the 1920s, waves of rural migrants from Cuba's interior provinces had flocked to Havana to work in cigar factories, the hospitality industry, construction, and as domestics. They brought with them many of the musical genres considered to be part of what Benjamin Lapidus (2008) classifies as the "*changüí* complex," that includes

nengón.¹¹² These genres brought by rural migrants all use the *tres* as a *montuno* playing instrument, often constructing *tres* montunos that followed vocal refrains in exact unison. By the time these montunos also got grafted onto Cuban/Latin piano *tumbaos*, the *montuno*, as a melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic musical entity, had largely become independent of its attached vocal refrains.

As part of the rural *montuno* vocabulary spanning genres such as *changüí* and *son*, the *nengón* motif has largely worked under Cuba's popular music genre radar. Although its song texts, containing an *estribillo* (refrain) and stock verses, have been considered too quaint and regional for bustling urban environments, the *tres* motif, separated from the *nengón* genre as a whole, has come to be considered an obscure musical morpheme for traditional *son* and its offshoots including *son montuno* and *salsa*.

Even today, whereas in Cuba's rural *Oriente* provinces, the *nengón* motif's rural origins are instantly and audibly recognizable, in urban Cuba, Latin America, and the U.S., the *nengón* motif has remained anomalous and amorphous. Difficult to integrate into *clave*-based genres such as *son*, *guaracha*, and *salsa*, the *nengón* motif has, at times, persistently insinuated its half-*clave* structure onto clavecized genres. At other times, it has had its cyclical length doubled in order to support clavecization and its harmonic palette expanded to encompass secondary dominants and extended jazz chords.

¹¹² Benjamin Lapidus, *Origins of Cuban Music and Dance: Changüí* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

The *Nengón* Motif on Piano: Specificity, Genericism, and *Clave* Direction

Compared to other specific and generic genre markers in Cuban popular music, the *nengón* motif has remained sufficiently specific to be subtly included and spotted, while generic enough to fuse with other genres. This may be due to the fact that the traditional *nengón* motif harmonically articulates a single arpeggiated gesture/texture, in contrast to multi-gesture/texture *guajeos* and *tumbaos* in other genres, often in longer cycles and employing a multitude of melodically diatonic passing tones and rhythmic syncopations. In terms of rhythmic and harmonic genericism, the *nengón* motif is most aesthetically and functionally similar to the single-gesture/texture piano's *chachachá tumbao*: right-hand on-beat chords atop invariably off-beat left-hand chords. Just as the piano's generic *chachachá tumbao* has come to be used outside the *chachachá* genre primarily for sectional contrasts such as *bolero* bridges and *timba cuerpos* (song strophes), the *nengón* motif has flavored *son*, *son montuno*, and even *salsa* with its archaic musk.

Additionally, both the *chachachá tumbao*'s and *nengón* motif's cross-genre ubiquity may hinge upon their relationships to the *clave* pattern itself and its stress patterns. Both the *chachachá tumbao* and *nengón* motif are considered *clave*-neutral: neither suggest clear *clave* direction. The *chachachá tumbao* is so unmistakably *clave*-neutral that it entirely avoids the *tresillo*'s three pulses: downbeat, *bombo*, and *ponche* (discussed below). The *chachachá tumbao* has therefore needed no clavicization, simplification or harmonic expansion to thrive; its right and left hands move together in a

prescribed harmonic rhythm. In contrast, the *nengón* motif, built entirely around the *clave*'s *tresillo*, (3-side), has necessitated and responded favorably to clavecization (audio examples 7.8 and 7.9).

As the modern piano has supplanted the *tres*' primacy in Cuban popular music, primarily due to its registral range and easily accessible chromatic keyboard, it has adapted, decorated, and amalgamated *tres guajeo* patterns into its *montuno* vocabulary. In textural terms, since the *nengón* motif is traditionally a single *tres* line, its pianistic application has involved octave doubling (and tenth harmonization (consult audio examples 7.13 and 7.14).

Aware of these issues (genericism versus specificity, clavecization and instrumental application), we now return to our initial trio of departure points.

(1) The *Nengón* and *Cinquillo* Figures as Rotational Equivalencies

Long before the Cuban asymmetrical binary *clave* was codified into its two unequal halves, West African ceremonial and social music traditions made ample use of "time line" patterns, what Agawu (2003) calls *topoi*.¹¹³ Many of the time line bell, clap, rattle, and supporting drum patterns are, not coincidentally, interrelated. Most are sounded against duple meters, subdividing the *tactus* (main isochronous pulse) into binary or ternary subdivisions. The Cuban *clave* pattern has most often been traced back to so-called 12/8 patterns (I.E. [X0x 0xx 0x0 x0x] or [X0x 0x0 xx0 x0x]). Many rhythm

¹¹³ Agawu, *Representing African Music*.

and meter scholars call this ur-pattern "diatonic" because its asymmetrical halves can be divided into five and seven respective pulses. Some Afro-Diasporic musicians and scholars such as Butler poetically employ the 12-note chromatic piano keyboard to describe the 12/8 *bembe* bell pattern, with the five-pulse half mapped to the black keys and the seven-pulse half mapped to the white keys.¹¹⁴ Within the broad category of diatonic rhythms, Butler distinguishes between those that are entirely even (i.e., isochronous), maximally even (diatonic) and uneven (syncopated).

Within the Cuban context, the *cinquillo* pattern is considered to be older than the asymmetrical binary *clave*; its roots are traced to Dahomey and Congo-derived songs and dances brought to Cuba by Arará slaves and Haitian sugarcane workers in the nineteenth century. The *cinquillo* rhythmic pattern is of the additive variety, maximally dividing eight pulses: 3+3+2. Furthermore, each subgroup of three pulses is again maximally evenly divided 2+1. The *cinquillo* pattern is therefore maximally even on both its macro- and micro-levels: [X0xx 0xx0]. Audio example 7.1 demonstrates the *cinquillo* pattern in sixteenth notes against a quarter-note tactus in common time. Beginning from the same downbeat, the *cinquillo* and *nengón* patterns differ only in their final pulses. This may be termed a "variant relationship," in which two elements are identical save for minor alterations. Audio example 7.2 demonstrates the *nengón* figure: [X0xx 0x0x] against the same 4/4 quarter-note tactus. The *nengón* figure differs from the *cinquillo* pattern only in the placement of its final pulse, delaying it by one sixteenth.

¹¹⁴ Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 80-83.

However, the *nengón* pattern also shares a rotational relationship with the *cinquillo* pattern. Audio example 7.3 demonstrates how the *cinquillo* pattern, shifted backward by five sixteenth notes "miraculously" forms the *nengón* figure. The *cinquillo*'s 3+3+2 structure makes this possible by placing the two-pulse component as the second rather than the final grouping. Rotating the *cinquillo* cell backwards by two sixteenth notes yields the amphibrach pattern [Xx0x x0x0], common in Scott Joplin's rags and opening Claude Debussy's "Golliwogg's Cakewalk" from his *Children's Corner Suite* (L.119). Audio example 7.4 demonstrates the *cinquillo* pattern doubly rotated to form the amphibrach, first against the 4/4 tactus by two sixteenths, then within the pattern itself, such that the *cinquillo*'s second pulse forms the amphibrach's first downbeat pulse.

(2) The *Nengón* Motif's Autonomy and Cross-genre Mobility

Although the prototypical *nengón* figure in its traditional form is inextricable from the rural song and dance forms with which it is associated, the motif has imprinted the genres of *son* (played by *sextetos* and *septetos*), *son montuno* (played by *conjuntos*), *descarga* (played by small groups of mixed instrumentation) and *salsa orquestas*. The *nengón* motif has been extricated from its song and dance, surviving on its own as a subconsciously recognizable *guajeo* or *tumbao* motif, migrated from *tres* to piano, bass, and brass.

This adaptability is what Stanley Crouch categorizes as African "infinite plasticity." The *nengón* motif's intrinsic properties imply specific kinds of plasticity (or

elasticity), from the number of possible pulses and pitches, to the harmonic instruments upon which it is typically played.

As we will see throughout this section's audio examples, the *nengón* figure exhibits a problematic relationship with the asymmetrical *son clave*. Given the Cuban *clave*'s two halves: *tresillo* (3+3+2) and *jimagua* (pairs of isochronous pulses) the *nengón* motif has interacted with *clave* alternation in the following ways: as a half-*clave tresillo* cell repeated across both *clave* halves, and as an expanded clavecized cell in which the motif, aligned with the *clave*'s *tresillo* (or "3-side") alternates with an isochronous duple meter phrase aligned with the *clave*'s *jimagua* (or "2-side").

Due to its *cinquillo* base, *nengón* is often analyzed as being *clave*-less. Lapidus argues that, like *changüí*, *nengón* is rendered *clave*-less because the *paseos de calle*, *tres* arpeggiations inserted between vocal verse lines, disrupt what might otherwise conform to a 3-side 2-side *clave* alternation.¹¹⁵ Musicians such as the *bongocero* and *marimbulero* José Taberas (long-time member of Grupo Changüí de Guantánamo) go as far as to maintain that *changüí* actually contains its own *clave*: [000x 00x0] which is elsewhere theorized by Latin musicians and scholars with the terms *bombo* and *ponche*, with *bombo* referring to the *tresillo*'s second pulse, and *ponche* referring to the *tresillo*'s final pulse.

¹¹⁵ Lapidus, *Origins*.

(3) The *Nengón* Motif's Abstraction across Popular Music Genres

Throughout its journey across Cuban/Latin popular music genres, the *nengón* motif has endured apart from its traditional context, becoming increasingly abstracted both as musical morphological vocabulary and lexically abstract procedure. This is partially due to its rhythmic and harmonic specificity. In traditional rural *nengón*, the supporting "minor" percussion (*maracas* and *guayo* invariably play the pattern [X0xx x0xx] which is used in everything from *guaracha campecina* to up-tempo *charangas*, *songo*, and *timba*. That pattern is too generic to be a strong genre marker of any kind. This can be simply tested and proven. No one hearing *maracas*, *güiro*, *claves*, *campana*, *contracampana*, *conga*, or *bongó* by themselves would know for which genres these generic patterns are being used to support. Similarly, the anticipated bass, whether played on *marímbula*, acoustic, upright, or electric bass, remains too generic to denote any genre. Yet, that seemingly simple *tres*-based *nengón* motif is instantly recognizable as representing a genre, whether *son*, *son montuno*, or *nengón* itself.

Harmonically, the *nengón*'s traditional dominant/tonic (V-I) progression, usually in major tonality, has been reformulated to constitute four diatonic or chromatic chords. This underscores the importance of pinpointing the exact parameters of flexibility that musical motifs such as the *nengón* figure have come to require in order to be "liberated" from permanent genre classifications and able to straddle subsequent genres.

Traditional *Nengón Guantanamero*

In 1986, the Cuban musicologist Danilo Orozco led an oral history research project called *Integrales del Son*, involving centenarian members of the Valera Miranda family.¹¹⁶ Amidst musical demonstrations and elaborate verses, the oral histories also contain stories about Cuba's independence struggle against Spain. Many of *nengón*'s stock and composed verses were, according to the Valera Miranda informants, sung both at *guateques* (local feast gatherings) and surreptitiously by Cuban soldiers fighting off Spain's colonial yoke. On *Integrales Del Son*, *nengón* is demonstrated either with solo *tres* (audio example 7.5), or *tres* with vocals, *bongó del monte* and supporting hand claps (audio example 7.6). In these demonstrations, the tonality is invariably major and the progression is invariably dominant/tonic.

Audio example 7.5 excerpts the first solo *tres* demonstration over V-I chords in E-major, in binary and ternary meters. The ternary figures, according to Orozco and María Teresa Linares, may have preceded *nengón* in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁷ The *nengón* motif: [X0xx 0x0x] is also varied with double notes: [Xxxx 0xxx Xxxx 0xxx].

Audio example 7.6 excerpts another *nengón* demonstration over V-I chords in D-major, with the *nengón* figure in the *tres*, vocal refrains, and a skeletal *martillo bongó* pattern. As in most *nengones*, the vocal refrain's text says, "Yo he nacido para ti, *Nengón*" ("I was born for you, *Nengón*"). This refrain's rhythm is: [X0xx 0xxx Xx0x 00xx | Xx0x 00xx Xx0x 0000]. According to Lapidus, the word *nengón* may be a

¹¹⁶ Danilo Orozco, *Integrales del Son*, 1986.

¹¹⁷ Orozco and María Teresa Linares.

corruption of *negrón* (the "ón" being a Spanish superlative honorific suffix).¹¹⁸ Other *nengones* retain the phrase *para ti nengón* while replacing the "*Yo he nacido*" with familiar-form imperatives, "*Cójelo!*" ("Take it!") or "*Tíralo*" ("Throw it!"). These alternatives seem to me to be more concerned with correct stress than poeticism or rhetoric, since familiar-form imperatives in Spanish are the only verb conjugations stressing the first syllable.

The excerpted vocal *cuarteta* verse's text says, "In Guantánamo 16, colony of my hope, do not mistrust me, as I am within the law." The chorus, "*Yo nac ísolito para ti Nengón,*" is intoned heterophonically, presumably by the elderly members of the Valera Miranda family. Since the *maracas*, *guayo*, and *marímbula* supporting a number of supportive instrumental parts are absent from this demonstration, the *nengón* figure itself, heard in the *tres* and vocals, is implicitly considered by everyone involved to be a sufficient genre marker. Present, however, is a syncopated hand clap pattern (1& 2& 3& 4&, or [00x0 00x0]), reminiscent of the backbeat in American rock, pop, disco, and house. This "backbeat" would not enter Cuban music until 1940, when Arsenio Rodríguez and Antonio Arcaño incorporated the *tumbadora* (deep conga drum) into their ensembles, playing a *marcha* where this backbeat is accentuated with a slap sound.

By contrast, the opening *nengón* on Grupo Changüí de Guantánamo's 1983 album, *Fiesta Changüicera*, contains downbeat hand claps and finger snaps, as well as some elaborate ten-line *décimas* using Roman Catholic themes of saints and heaven. This

¹¹⁸ Lapidus, interview 11 September 2013 and written communication, n.d.

religious *topos* is actually common in surviving *nengones*, including Arsenio Rodríguez's *conjunto* treatment in his 1951 composition, "Zumba" (audio example 7.8.).

Clavecization of the *Nengón* Motif in Traditional Cuban *Son*

In the early twentieth century, as Cuban rural genres amalgamated into the *son* habanero played by sextetos and septetos, the opening *tres* introductions would invariably contain the *nengón* motif's characteristic arpeggiated rhythmic character: [X0xx 0xxx] or the variation: [X0xx 0xxx Xxxx 0xxx]. This arpeggiated introduction, an ornamented *nengón* motif, appears on every commercial *son* recording from Sexteto Habanero's earliest 1918 *estribillos* to the classics penned by Ignacio Piñeiro, founder of Septeto Nacional, reconstituted numerous times since the 1950s and touring the world today.

Audio example 7.7 was recorded in 2007, chosen for its modern stereo audio and authentic environment. The presumably amateur repertoire group, Mi Nuevo Son, performed it at a festival in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba.¹¹⁹ Unlike the previous audio examples, "Soy Laborí" introduces the bass's reinforcement of the *tres guajeo*. The song, "Soy Labori," is introduced as "one of the earliest known *sones*." It was most likely composed by *tresero* troubadour Ramón Laborí (also spelled Naborí), whose musical and poetic exploits were chronicled by Arsenio Rodríguez in his 1951 composition, "Caminante y Laborí." That song relates a confrontation between two wandering *treseros*, one called

¹¹⁹ Recording courtesy of Michelle White, 2007.

Caminante, the other Ramón Laborí, who lived into the 1940s and was Arsenio's musical mentor.

In Mi Nuevo Son's version of "Soy Laborí," we find the *nengón* motif in both the half-*clave* and complete-*clave* forms. The *tres* plays the half-*clave* form [X0xx 0x0x X0xx 00xx] over an IV-V-I progression in F-major, while the *coro*'s second phrase: [X0xx x000] clavecizes the phrase over the tonic chord, conforming to the *clave*'s 2-side. As in earlier traditional *sones*, the bass pattern is a simplification of both the *nengón* motif and the *cinquillo* pattern: [X00X 000x X00X 0000] with the *clave*'s 2-side ornamented with diatonic passing-note pickups to the next downbeat. Unlike *son*'s early acoustic bassists, many of whom barely mastered Western intonation after switching over from the *marímbula*, Mi Nuevo Son's bassist performs his line with a bell-like quality and precise intonation. The *bongó* marking, though more constricted than in 1920s-1930s-era *son*, is nonetheless tasty. The lead vocal *cuartetas*, as in many "folk" *sones*, employ stock verses rhymed A B B A.

Compared to traditional *nengón* harmony, where the tonic chord only arrives on the second cycle's *ponche*, this *son* substitutes the traditional two-beat dominant with the IV and V. The tonic takes up the *nengón* motif's second cycle. This will prove to be the harmonic trend throughout the *nengón* motif's journey into other related Cuban and pan-Latino genres; its harmony will contain three or four chords over the motif's two cycles. In the three-chord version, the tonic chord lasts for the entire second cycle, while in four-

chord versions, discussed in audio examples 7.8 through 7.14, the tonic appears only once, either as the first or last chord.

Clavecized *Nengón* in *Conjunto Son Montuno*

Audio example 7.8 is presented in its entirety: it is Arsenio Rodríguez's "Zumba," recorded on April 3rd, 1951.¹²⁰ Here, piano joins bass and *tres* as harmonic instruments responsible for *montuneo*. Most striking is the clavecization of the *nengón* motif in the song's refrain, with the word *zumba* occupying the 2-3 *clave*'s first half using isochronous pulses and the *nengón* motif in the *clave*'s second half over the traditional text, "*para ti Nengón*". Again in keeping with traditional *nengón*, "Zumba's" C major harmonic progression is V for the first *nengón* cycle and I for the second.

Arsenio Rodríguez, having lived in rural municipalities outside Havana proper such as his birthplace Guira de Macurijes, likely did not grow up with *nengón*. He probably learned about *nengón* from his Guantánamo-born pianist/arranger/collaborator Luis "Lilí" Martínez Griñán, who went on to compose and arrange for Félix Chappotín's *conjunto*, bequeathed by Arsenio when he and his family relocated to New York City in 1952.

In terms of genre markers, "Zumba" both modernizes and honors traditional *nengón*. Atop the ever-present *conga-bongó son-montuno* matrix, Félix Chappotín's four introductory trumpet *glosas* reference jazz-inflected cross-rhythms and blues-inflected

¹²⁰ Arsenio Rodríguez's "Zumba," recorded 3 April 1951.

intervals (flatted thirds, fifths, and sevenths). Meanwhile, Arsenio's *tres* solo could have been played over a traditional *changüí* at double the "Zumba" tempo.

Topically, the "Zumba" text represents a convergence of numerous Afro-Cuban cultural strands. Its title refers to *congo*-derived Palo Mayombe spiritual traditions, specifically Kicongo creation mythology. The song juxtaposes rurality, urbanity, modernity, and the Old Testament Biblical account of human creation.

Combined with the creation myth outlined in the two lead vocal *cuarteta guías*, it is as though a parallel musical creation history is being narrated, fusing rural *nengón*, urban Afro-Cuban *son-montuno*, and African-American blues.

Textually, "Zumba" deals with a syncretic transcultural mythology, saluting an unnamed Egyptian pharaoh, the first ancient Israelite patriarchs, Noah's ark, and King Solomon, all within the first verse. The use of a Kicongo word, "zumba," to introduce a decided Judeo-Christian creation story embodies the seeming contradictions of Arsenio's spirituality, many of which would intensify upon his resettlement in the United States. Arsenio and his family were at once Palo and Regla *Lukumí* devotees, Roman Catholics, and later, Jehovah's Witnesses. "Zumba" demonstrates that all these strands could and did coexist not only in a New World spiritual melting pot, but more strikingly in a commercial dance music marketplace.

Audio example 7.10, Félix Chappottín's "Alto Songo," further clavecizes the *nengón* motif in the *coro*, while the harmonic instruments (bass, *tres*, and piano) realize the motif in its traditional half-*clave* form. Whereas Arsenio's "Zumba" is in 2-3 *clave*,

clavecizing the first *nengón* cycle and retaining the traditional form for the *clave*'s 3-side, Chappottín's "Alto Songo," being in 3-2 *clave*, reverses the half-*clave* and clavecized forms of the *nengón* motif, with the traditional form coming first. The harmony is a IV-V-IV-I progression in G major, preceded by Lili Martínez's *ad libitum* rubato parallel tenths introduction tonicizing D major before it acquires a C natural and tonicizes G major.

The song's *estribillo* (refrain) concerns two neighboring towns, Alto Songo and La Maya. The song's protagonist is presumably a town cryer, either from Alto Songo or La Maya, informing Alto Songo's inhabitants that La Maya is burning.

The vocal *guías*, including a pseudo-*décima*, are inimitably sung by the late great *sonero*, Miguelito Cuní. They concern a drifter, perhaps implicitly on the run from women or police, listing the professions he has assumed in various Cuban provinces:

I was born in Guantánamo. In Santiago, I sold milk. In Placeta, I sold coal. In Cienfuegos, I was a pharmacist. In Cárdenas, I was an undertaker. In mi Cuba, I was a wander. And now that I'm in Havana, I style myself as a singer.¹²¹

Clavecized *Nengón* in *Descarga*

Audio example 3.10, also presented in full, is a *descarga* version of the traditional Cuban *son estribillo*, "A Buscar Camarón" by Israel "Cachao" López and his combo, recorded between 1955 and 1960. These Cuban *descargas* (jam sessions) had previously taken place mostly underground at after-hours clubs where musicians would go after

¹²¹ Miguelito Cuní, vocalist.

playing gigs in jazzbands or *charangas* sightreading intricate charts (arrangements).

Cachao's *descargas* were therefore formatted around well known *estribillos* over which percussionists such as *conguero* Tata Guines and *timbalero* Barretico, pianist Peruchín Yustís and trumpeter "el negro" Vivar could freely expound.

In contrast to the previous two examples by Arsenio and Chappottín, the *nengón* motif here remains unclavecized over 2-3 *clave*, discernable from the *conga marcha* and *tuimbal cáscara* patterns. The harmonic progression, in G-major, is IV-V-IV-I, identical to Chappottín's "Alto Songo." The 2-3 *clave* direction is typical of what I call "the great *clave* shift" beginning in the late 1920s, where the musical downbeat began to be associated with the *clave*'s 2-side, where the pattern contains a rest, rather than the *clave*'s tresillo (3-side) where the downbeat is present.

While the earliest origins of "A Buscar Camarón" are uncertain, Arsenio Rodríguez did record this traditional song in the same key on November 16th, 1943, with a brief introduction absent from Cachao's version. The refrain says, "Let's go down to the river and look for shrimp." I have been told that "shrimp," as in many other popular songs, is a metaphor for pretty women.

In Cachao's version, the *nengón* motif (again realized by bass, piano, and *tres*) is articulated in two ways: first in the traditional form, then as tresillo chordal jabs on the downbeat and *bombo* of each *clave* half. El Negro Vivar's trumpet solo is striking for its jazzy chromaticism, while the percussion solos by Tata Guines and Barretico employ a wide array of improvised cross-rhythms, quotations of traditional folkloric phrases from

Palo and *Abakuá*'s lead drum vocabularies, and the beginnings of drum set rudiments applied to Afro-Cuban percussion.

The Clavecized *Nengón* Motif in *Salsa*

By the 1960s, Cuban popular genres had made their way across Latin America, Europe, Africa, and the United States, sparking a panoply of imitations, adaptations, and alterations to genres including *son*, *guaracha*, *bolero*, *mambo*, and *chachachá*. The Cuban Eduardo Davidson's *pachanga* had become New York's *charanga* craze, popularized by artists such as the Cuban flutist José Fajardo, Dominican flutist Johnny Pacheco, pianist Charlie Palmieri (con la Duboney) and *conguero*/bandleader Rey Barretto. *Mambo* had already enjoyed widespread popularity in the 1940s and 1950s with a host of jazzbands (*orquestas*) including Pérez Prado, Bebo Valdés, Machito, Tito Rodríguez, and Tito Puente, among many others. Within the context of mid/up tempo 2-3-*clave mambo*, the jaunty or stately *nengón* motif would seem sparse and out of place. Also, since *mambo* is characterized by layered interlocking syncopated rhythmic patterns, the *nengón*'s *tresillo* base may have been dismissed as being too simplistic.

Hypothetic speculations aside, in 1964, Nuyorican *conguero*, Joe Cuba, featuring Puerto Rican vocalist Cheo Feliciano, recorded an enduring hit, "El Ratón" ("The Rat") (audio example 3.11).

In contrast to *pachanga* and *mambo*, this song clocks in at a slower tempo than the average *bolero*, *son montuno*, or *danzón*. In the pan-Latino musical cosmology that

would eventually embrace the marketing term, *salsa*, "El Ratón" was considered a *guajira*, even though the *nengón* motif sounds nothing like the *guajiro* arpeggios popularized by Joseíto Fernández in his epic "Guajira." The tempo of "El Ratón" is exaggeratedly slower than most *guajiras de salón*.¹²² "El Ratón's" harmonic progression, articulated by the piano *guajeo* and bass *tumbao*, uses extended jazz harmony rather than the primary diatonic chords associated with *nengón* and *son*. In A-minor, the progression is i-V/Vi-V/V-V (with substituted tritone dominant). The *nengón* motif is introduced by the piano, then harmonized by baby bass and vibraphone, which, in the typical Latin sextet format, replaces all horns and woodwinds. Atop the piano's minor sixth and flatted fifth dominant chords, the vibraphone's motorized tremolo situates "El Ratón" in the milieu of experimental music, bebop jazz, and mysterious movie soundtracks.

Cheo Feliciano's vocal verses are not intricately rhymed octasyllabic *décimas* or even simpler *cuartetas*: they are loosely rhymed stream-of-consciousness couplets relating a metaphoric fable about a cat and mouse reminiscent of the red rooster and bo weevil tropes in African-American blues. Playing on the ambiguity of whether *ratón* actually means "mouse" or "rat" in Nuyorican slang, the tale's moral is made abundantly clear by the final couplet: any mouse (or rat) who tells on his cat jumping the house's fence and sneaking out late at night is a snitch or rat.

¹²² The term *guajiras de salón* means stylized urban *guajiras* orchestrated for *conjuntos* and jazzbands rather than the traditional rural stringed instruments *laúd* and *guitarra*.

Nengón in Dominican Salsa

Although the Dominican Republic is best known for popular genres such as *merengue* and *bachata*, a vibrant subculture of Cuban son interpreters has always existed. Its notable exceptions include Cheché Abreu, the recently departed Joseíto Mateo and Cuco Valoy. Audio example 7.13 is an excerpt of Cuco Valoy's 1980s hit, "Juliana," subsequently revitalized in a 1990s cover by Dark Latin Groove (DLG), arranged by one of salsa's top producer/arrangers during the past thirty years, Sergio George. The song's text revolves around a naïve young man's betrayal by a bad woman, Juliana. Cuco Valoy's verses sometimes employ the rhyming schemes of Spanish *cuartetas* and *décimas*. However, many of the verses are more than ten lines long and break the traditional *décima* rhyme scheme ABBA ACCDDC.

The *nengón* figure over an I-V progression in B-flat major is played by Cuco Valoy's son Ramón Orlando, an accomplished pianist, arranger and bandleader in his own right. However, unlike other examples of the *nengón* motif studied here, the motif only appears in the solo piano *guajeo* that opens the song. The rest of the song uses a standard traditional I-IV-V *montuno* progression, complete with a generic piano *tumbao*. It is of course difficult to draw conclusions regarding Ramón Orlando's conceptualization of the *nengón* motif's relationship to *salsa*. Nonetheless, the musical evidence is present for genre-based analysis.

Nengón in Henry Fiol's *Salsa Subterranea*

Audio example 7.14, Henry Fiol's "Tan Aragón" is excerpted from track 6 of my father's 2012 album, *Ciudadano Del Mundo* (*Citizen of the World*). The song's text depicts an incorribly slothful man who puts off everything till a timeless tomorrow and therefore fails to progress in life.

The *nengón* motif is played in the piano's second and third octaves, a registral choice reminiscent of *son montuno*'s use of lower-register piano *guajeos* because of the *tres*' presence. The harmonic progression is IV-V-ii-vi, an expansion of traditional *nengón*'s V-I harmony. The C-major arpeggio introduces a decorative middle pulse between the *nengón* figure's first and third pulses. In the manner of anticipated bass, the harmony places the opening IV chord on the *ponche*, the downbeat's pickup.

The *nengón* motif used here is similar to other instances where my father and I used it in his arrangements to convey a super *típico* (traditional) vibe, most notably during the piano break and subsequent montuno section in "Viviendo Sin Tu Amor," track 5 on 1994's *El Don Del Son*, on which I played piano, keyboards, and congas. There, the harmonic progression is VII-I in A-minor. The motif itself is given using a harmonized octave texture in the piano's low-mid register.

Reflections

Many times during my years of Cuban/Latin music study and research, I have come across phenomena that defy conventional explanations and classifications. At those

times, I have wished it were possible to make contact with long deceased musicians in order to ascertain what they played and why they played it. In my father's case, his use of the *nengón* motif had more to do with his understanding of traditional Cuban son than the *nengón* genre itself. But how did Arsenio Rodríguez or Lili Martínez conceptualize their uses of many *nengón* features in their arrangements? Was the motif meant to evoke a rurality familiar to both of them and to many Cuban listeners? What of Cachao's *descarga* "A Buscar Camarones," where the *nengón* motif is simplified and clavecized? Is a *nengón*-based analysis of Joe Cuba's "El Ratón" stylistically appropriate or too far fetched for *salsa*?

Unable to summon forth the voices of deceased musicians, I have found an alternate method to infer possible musical intentions based on sound-centered analysis. Speculations aside, the sounds in these fourteen examples yield an inescapable truth—the *nengón* figure appears in traditional *sones*, *son montunos*, *descargas*, and *salsas*, usually clavecized and rhythmically varied with decorative variations. It was only after hearing and imbibing *nengón* in its indigenous rural context that I began spotting it in unmistakably urban genres applying *tres guajeos* to the piano. Rather than second guess this analysis, I followed its lead, letting its sounds guide me to possible interpretations. In this sense, the sounds of the Cuban/Latin memory archive are my historiography, the equivalents to archaeological shards or hand-copied manuscripts carefully archived in museums and libraries. Just as Medieval or Baroque music specialists use treatises and paintings to piece together historically informed purposes, Cuban and Latin musicians

use our memorized sound archive of vocabularies, repertories, and abstract procedures to connect genres to one another using a variety of markers. In tracking the journeys of specific musical figurations, gestures and textures across time and space, we are strengthening a sonic narrative of Cuban music history, as Senegambian griots sing of ancient battles and powerful kingdoms or Yoruba *babalawos* chant the odus of Ifá.

In the next chapter, I explore how this entire analytical apparatus of vocabularies, repertories and abstract procedures, affinities, antipathies, and necessities coalesce around *timba* as an *ingergénero* (literally inter-genre). As in so many traditional Cuban/Latin genres, the piano *tumbao* stands for many complex cultural, aesthetic, creative, and emotional realities. It can be a genre marker, an element of a musical mixture, an incorporation of Western art music's gestural/textural vocabulary or the West African-inspired conversation aesthetic. All these connections are made and maintained at performances, recordings and rehearsals across the Cuban musical diaspora, each time a pianist consults the collective memory archive and makes a creative choice.

CHAPTER 8

Grooves and Gears: Cyclicity and Narrativity in Cuban *Timba* Piano

Introduction

Having presented parametric paradigms for Cuban/Latin music analysis, musical mixture and genre, we now turn to *timba* piano. Focusing on the piano's role in the *timba* rhythm section, this chapter explores how the piano *tumbao*, on micro- and macro-levels, can be viewed as an ongoing attempt to reconcile cyclicity with narrativity. Applying our parametric paradigm of vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures, we see how and why *timba* pianists construct their *tumbaos*. *Timba* piano's vocabulary, serving the needs of newly composed repertoire, has introduced an expanded set of abstract parametric procedures showcasing gestural/textural variety and motivic variation to define *cubaneo* in a bustling global music marketplace. As we have seen in chapter 2, *timba* has expanded the piano's ensemble role in previous popular music genres, from arpeggiated harmonic outline and rhythmic time keeping to micro-narrativity via an augmented vocabulary of melodic and rhythmic gestures. This has come about in two broad areas: piano *tumbaos* and rhythm section gears within the *montuno* section. The gestural/textural variety and motivic variation in *timba* piano *tumbaos* draws inspiration from changes in improvisatory aesthetics within Afro-Cuban folkloric genres such as *rumba guarapachangueo* and *batá Lukumí*. Among *timba* piano's structural innovations is the concept of the piano *tumbao* as an internal interlock between speaking and filler

notes.¹²³ *Timba*'s predilection for jazz-derived harmonic progressions involving secondary dominant chains and upper extension chords has created longer, more complex grooves than in previous genres with simpler, triadically functional harmony.

Surrounding these *timba* piano *tumbaos*, rhythm section arrangements have incorporated gear shifts signalling sectional divisions and heightening dancing intensity. These bass and percussion gear schemes include *pedal* or *presión* (dropouts, *efectos*, or short "hits") and *despelote* or *bomba*, in which the bass switches from pitches to slides and thumps. The piano's participation in these gear schemas, sometimes changing *tumbaos*, other times holding down the fort, have enabled listeners and dancers to identify each band's *sello* (signature sound). For the *timba* pianist, the signature sound is achieved and maintained creating new *tumbaos* and applying gestural/textural variations to pre-existing ones. *Timba* piano *tumbaos* have thus changed the piano's overall role in the composite rhythm section, from accompaniment to a musical role between support and lead. Especially during *presión* or *pedal* sections, where bass and percussion drop out to highlight the piano *tumbao*, there is now a space for the piano's gestural/textural variety to be foregrounded during the *montuno* section, rather than being bracketed off in the piano solo.

In close analysis of *timba tumbaos* by three piano pioneers, Iván "Melón" González, Tirso Duarte, and Eduardo "Chaka" Nápoles, I apply the parametric paradigms

¹²³ Hill, "Conjunto Piano," 34.

outlined in chapters 4 and 5 to *timba* piano's gestures, textures, and strategies for playing changing material atop cyclical harmonic progressions.¹²⁴

***Timba* and African-American Funk, Groove, and Flow**

Since *timba* owes so much to African-American jazz and funk's rhythmic grooves, additive harmony, and blues melody, scholarship in these genres opens some analytical windows. Anne Danielsen's analyses of James Brown and Parliament Funkadelic grooves stresses the importance of the 1 as an organizational principle of interlocking repeating funk grooves.¹²⁵ Los Van Van's drummer José Luis "Changuito" Quintana incorporated backbeat-based rhythms into the *clave* framework, foreshadowing *timba* drum kit players' use of funk patterns. Irakere's bassist Carlos Del Puerto was one of the first to find an affinity between sparse funk bass lines, slap techniques, and Afro-Cuban rhythms. NG La Banda's jazzy, punchy horn *mambos* were influenced by Blood Sweat & Tears as well as Tower Of Power. During *despelote* gears, thumping and sliding bass, drum set, and cowbell all reinforce the downbeat of the *clave*'s 2-side.

Goal-Directed Versus Autotelic Harmony

As we have seen in chapter 1, the *largo* or *canto* section within the structures of Cuban popular dance music employ goal-directed narrative harmonic progressions in

¹²⁴ All musical examples have either been transcribed from historical recordings by this author and Kevin Moore or played by the pianists themselves in MIDI. This corpus is unique because each MIDI or notated example allows these pianists to present ideal versions of their *tumbaos* for posterity.

¹²⁵ Danielson 2006.

order to convey a sense of musical beginning, middle, and end. By contrast, the harmonic progressions in open *montuno* sections are autotelic and meant to repeat, either with the same or different *montunos* played over top. While autotelic cyclical progressions clearly begin and end at fixed points, they are not goal-directed.

Analyzing Stevie Wonder's 1970s ground-breaking compositions, Timothy Hughes offers a vital intersection between cyclical and teleological motion, which he calls groove and flow.¹²⁶ For Hughes, grooves are the hypnotic building blocks that, when combined with forward flow, situate Stevie Wonder's music within larger African-American and Afro-Diasporic musics. Not only do *timba*'s harmonic progressions correlate to Hughes' groove concept, *tumbaos* themselves, in terms of harmony and gestural components, embody both groove and flow. The *timba* arrangement, read on one level as consisting of cycling grooves, also reveals a persistent concern with flow, event succession, arcs, tensions, and resolutions. Although *timba* piano's gestural/textural vocabulary owes little to funk's clavinet, Fender Rhodes, and Hammond B3 organ parts, harmonic progressions have been liberally lifted. One of *timba*'s most frequently used harmonic progression (VI-V-i-IV in minor tonality) comes from Grover Washington's early-1980s hit, "Just the Two of Us." This progression is used on Manolito Simonet's "Llegó La Música Cubana" (1997), Issac Delgado's "La Temática" (1997), *Charanga Habanera*'s "El Blablabla" (1998), Klímax's "Jueguito de Manos" (1996), and Paulito FG's "El Más Buscado" (2005).

¹²⁶ Timothy Hughes, *Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2003).

Timba's selective blend of Afro-Cuban and funk elements provides an intriguing answer to the questions raised in Chapter Five regarding musical mixture recipes. *Timba* piano particularly provides an ever-present link to Cuba's "traditional" popular musics, while the funk grooves used on bass, drumset, and *teclado* (synthesizer) reinforce *timba*'s cosmopolitan mandate.

The *Timba* Arrangement

Like Cuban popular music's predecessors, *timba* arrangements conform to some general structural divisions: *introducción*, *cuero*, *estribillo*, and *coda*. The *introducción* generally consists of a goal-driven horn melody against which the bass usually plays standard *mambo* or *salsa tumbao* and the piano comps chords. This piano/bass accompaniment formula generally applies to the *cuero* section in which the lead singer "defends" the song's textual and melodic content. Strophic *cueros* are interpolated with *punte* or bridge sections highlighting the arranger's harmonic prowess by exploring distant keys and extended jazz sonorities build upon additive sixth, seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords. During *cueros* and *puentes*, *timba* pianists often revert to *mambo* and *salsa tumbao* styles as realizations of lead sheet chord notation. The *estribillo* or *montuno* section generally opens with the signature piano *tumbao* especially created for it, with the *congas*, *timbales*, and bass dropping out to highlight it. *Estribillos* can also be introduced with *motivo* (unison or octave doubled) and treatments of bass *tumbaos*, with piano or synth doubling the bass line. The *montuno* section continues with

alternations of *coros* (harmonized vocal refrains), and *guías* (precomposed lead vocal commentaries). Bridge sections or *mambos* (repeating horn figures), alternate with *coro/guía* sections in which bass/percussion gears (discussed below) provide *timba* arrangements with temporally climactic arcs. New *coros* and *mambos* are often set up by gear changes, during which piano *tumbaos* are either varied, maintained as bulwarks, or replaced with entirely new ones. Although studio versions of many *timba* songs use fadeouts as endings, composed codas, usually employing extensive unison breaks, are also used.¹²⁷ Working within this outlined arrangement structure, *timba tumbaos* challenge previous genres' penchants for literal repetition.

Grooves and Gears¹²⁸

The underlying groove of any piece of Cuban dance music, known as *la marcha*, consists of generic patterns or song-specific parts for percussion, piano, and bass. Bass *tumbaos* and percussion *marchas* are varied according to strict permutative parameters intended to preserve each genre's essence while allowing for individual creativity or a group's signature sound. Following the lead of folkloric percussionists' use of *fantasmas* (ghost notes), *timba* has altered the historical balance between stasis and change in previous Cuban genres on three levels: song-specific *marchas*, interruption of *marchas* with breaks and modular gears. On the "micro" *marcha* level, this has been accomplished

¹²⁷ Perna, *Timba*, 109-126.

¹²⁸ The use of "gears" in this context is etic: Cubans use the terms *esquema* (scheme) and *mecánica* (mechanics) to describe modular bass and percussion routines.

by introducing more song-specific marchas (grooves) than any previous genre before Juan Formell's songo could claim, all in the service of more variety and less literal repetition. On the macro-sectional gear level, *timba* introduces many more opportunities for the entire rhythm section to interrupt the *marcha* with long and short breaks as well as modular gears.

Song-Specific Marchas

Since *timba*'s inception, song-specific and highly improvisatory *conga marchas* and piano *tumbaos* have shared the same structure; namely, the systematic fashioning of song-specific parts from a genre's rhythmic variation vocabulary using "speaking" and "filler" notes or pulses. For *congueros* such as Tomasito Cruz (famous for his work with Paulo FG) and Alexis "Mipa" Cuesta (renowned for his work with Manolín González, "el médico de la *salsa*,")) crafting *conga marchas* involved the same gestural/textural saturation techniques as piano *tumbaos*. *Timba* thus brought the piano, bass, and *conga* under a common hierarchical structure, with name, speaking, and filler pulses or pitches maintaining a constant N-cycle. This hierarchical ranking of speaking and filler notes therefore accounts for *conga marchas* using *manoteo* to keep a steady N-cycle pulse, bass *tumbaos* accomplish with string thumps and what piano *tumbaos* accomplish with the left hand.

Efectos and Bloques

As early as the 1940s, Arsenio Rodríguez and Antonio Arcaño's bands began marking off solos and *mambos* with elaborate unison breaks, called *cierres* or *bloques*. During the mid-1970s and early 1980s, expanded flute and violin-based *charangas* such as Ritmo Oriental became known for elaborate *bloques* that changed tempo and even employed different meters. By the 1990s, Cuban rhythm sections had begun experimenting with modular gear sections in which traditional patterns were replaced by rhythmic punctuations of vocal refrains, alternative patterns, conversations, or controlled improvisations. Signaled by hand gestures, these gear shifts turned one-dimensionally repeating *montunos* into arcs of grooves and gears, creating discursive narrativity within the *montuno* section.

The following is a composite list of bass and percussion gears spanning most major *timba* bands. Although these gear names are not universally employed, all of them are emic terms used by *timberos*; I have simply applied their terminologies to all known contexts in which their specified musical behaviors occur:

1. *Presión*: bass and *conga* dropout
2. *Mazacote*: alternate percussion patterns to the main *marcha*, often with absent or thumping bass
3. *Despelote*: sliding bass, driving percussion *marcha* and backbeat on the drumkit (intended for sensual female pelvic shakes and rotations)
4. *Muela*: subdued *marcha* for verbal exchange between singer and audience

Pianists such as Iván “Melón” Lewis and Tirso Duarte have elevated the song-specific *tumbao* derived from *son montuno* into a micro-narrative structure able to accommodate jazz-based harmonic substitution, Afro-Cuban folkloric rhythmic fragments, displacement, syncopated cross-rhythms, *clave* play, and cyclic counterpoint. Since *timba tumbaos* are rarely literally repeated, they provide an ideal foil for the various spontaneous or painstakingly rehearsed modular arrangement sections.

Timba and Repetition

One afternoon in 1992, I found myself conversing with the late great Mario Bauzá, Cuban multi-instrumentalist and musical director for Machito and his Afro-Cubans. We had struck up a telephone relationship since the day I called Columbia University’s radio station WKCR during a show on which Bauzá was a guest.

On this occasion, I asked an innocuous question: “Why did Machito often have to sing *coro* in his own band?” Bauzá replied that the band’s priorities lay in having all the brass and reeds necessary to realize the excellent arrangements that Josá Madera and Ray Santos were writing.

Mario said, “We were not like all those other Latin bands around New York, banging the cowbell all night long.”

This phrase, “banging the cowbell all night long” has stuck with me for over twenty years precisely because it seems incongruous when uttered by a black Cuban steeped in Afro-Cuban culture. Perhaps Bauzá’s attitude came from his upbringing, or his

conservatory training exclusively in Western art music. I knew that Bauzá's had joined Cab Calloway's band shortly after arriving from Cuba and that he loved jazz. So why this attitude toward the repetition of percussion patterns such as those of the cowbell?

The Cuban love/hate relationship with repetition historically rests on its associations with blackness and rural backwardness exemplified by genres such as *changüí* and early *son oriental*, in contrast to Creolized European derived narrative genres such as *danzón* and *bolero*.¹²⁹ Repetition was often the scapegoat for racially charged critiques of Afro-Cubans' supposed impulsivity by white Cuban classical composers and musicologists favoring Western music's narrative aesthetics and mistrusting repetition's hypnotic powers. Even today, strictly classical Cuban musicians have intimated to me that they consider groove-based popular musics to be based on too few elements and contained too little progressive motion.

Before the 1959 Revolution, black Cubans—hard-working, resourceful, and creative despite ongoing racial discrimination—called down spirits with ceremonial *batá* and *palo* songs and rhythms. They also danced to secular *rumba*, *son montuno*, and *charanga*. Black Cuban folkloric and popular musics embodied the epitome of rhythmically contrapuntal repetition and represented Cuba in the West's imagination. Yet, much of the *rumba* and *mambo* Cuba exported to the West was sanitized and watered down by white performers and consumed by predominantly white bourgeois audiences.

¹²⁹ Moore, *Music and Revolution*; Perna, *Sound*.

During its early years, the Cuban Revolution sought to redefine music's societal role, attempting to purge it of decadent bourgeois capitalist elements. During the 1960s and early 1970s, young Cubans preferred Western rock, soul, and jazz to indigenous genres. Reflecting the popular *zeitgeist*, innovative groups such as Los Van Van and Irakere combined various melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements from psychedelic rock and jazz with folkloric and popular Afro-Cuban rhythms. Seeking alternatives to repetition, these groups also consciously minimized the time given over to *estribillos*, preferring strophic *cuerpos* and numerous instrumental interludes. In much of Los Van Van's and Irakere's early output, the *estribillo* almost became an afterthought: songs were primarily identified by their *temas* rather than their *estribillos*.

Given this brief overview of Cuban society's historical repetition polemics, we can now ask: what and how does *timba* repeat? Within the context of Middleton's concepts of musematic and discursive repetition, *timba*'s musical structures and methods of professional organization pose interesting analytical problems.¹³⁰ "Musematic repetition is the repetition of short units: the most immediately familiar examples—riffs—are found in Afro-American musics and in rock."¹³¹ Since *timba* repeats on a multiplicity of metrical levels, it becomes difficult to evaluate the structural importance of riffs in relation to piano and bass *tumbaos* or percussion *marchas* because of how the "short unit" is defined. Just as drum parts or abstract chord progressions in rock tend to

¹³⁰ Richard Middleton, "'Play it Again, Sam': Some Notes on the Productivity of Repetition in Popular Music," *Popular Music* 3 (1983), 238.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

mean little without the riffs associated with each song, *timba*'s harmonic progressions, bass, and percussion patterns and *clave* structure mean little without the specific piano *tumbaos* and *coros* that define each song. Precisely because each *timba* song comes to be identified by specific piano *tumbaos* and *coros*, pianists take great care to create memorable opening *tumbaos* that will outlive their physical tenure and become part of a band's *sello*. Since *timba*'s harmonic progressions are often four to eight bars long and since piano *tumbaos* display immense gestural variety, they do not function temporally on the same scale as funk or rock riffs. The closest *timba* analogues to riffs in rhythm and blues or rock and roll are vocal *coros* and horn *mambos*, many of which can be laid out successively or layered over the same harmonic progression.

Explains Middleton, "Discursive repetition is the repetition of longer units, at the level of the phrase, defined as a unit roughly equivalent to a verbal clause or short sentence, not too long to be apprehended 'in the present,' the sentence, or even the complete section."¹³² Piano, bass, and synth *tumbaos* function on this discursive level of repetition. The autotelic nature of *timba*'s harmony actually encourages jazzy tritone substitutions for dominants, secondary dominant decorations, and common tone diminished seventh chords embellishing tonally functional progressions. As subsequent analyses will demonstrate, harmonic substitution is a fundamental *tumbao* variation strategy.

¹³² Ibid.

In his 2005 article, “On and On: Repetition as Process and Pleasure in Electronic Dance Music,” Luis-Manuel Garcia argues against repetition as regression or excessive commercial monotony by emphasizing the pleasure in experiencing repeating and gradually changing dance music grooves.¹³³ For Cuba’s conservatory-educated *timberos* trained in Western classical and jazz, *timba*’s groove and wave matrix offers a pleasurable creative outlet in which collectivity and individuality are celebrated. Playing and teaching *timba* piano, I can attest to the endurance and technical virtuosity needed to sustain *tumbaos* for twenty or thirty minutes without pause. Most non-pianist musicians and *timba* dancers with whom I’ve interacted seem awed by the rigors of this genre’s piano performance practice. For pianists, *tumbao* creation and variation are concrete tangibly fulfilling processes that increase pianistic prestige as reputations are built across bands. In my presence, pianists have delighted in the process of creating and varying their own and each other’s *tumbaos* as though it were a rarified art only comprehensible to fellow pianists. Although *timba*’s professional organizational strategies may undervalue the importance of the pianists who create signature *tumbaos*, results speak for themselves. Audiences clearly take notice of brilliant *tumbaos* and can even identify their original creators. Among themselves, pianists often debate the authenticity of informal lineages, each taking credit for original *tumbaos*. This suggests that during realtime moments in *timba* performance, pianists, musicians, bandleaders, and audiences are acutely aware,

¹³³ Luis-Manuel Garcia, “On and On: Repetition as Process and Pleasure in Electronic Dance Music,” *Music Theory Online* 11 no.4 (October 2005).

albeit on different levels, of the remarkable unfolding process of *tumbao* creation and variation.

***Sello* (Signature Sound)**

Theodor Adorno's critique of repetition in 1930s jazz and swing focuses on the dangers of mass production and mechanization, pointing out the formulaic nature of Tin Pan Alley song forms.¹³⁴ For Adorno, the commercial "plugging" of different artists performing iterations of the same song amounted to pseudo-individuality. Like most groove-based popular musics, many of Adorno's criticisms have been leveled against *timba* by elder Cubans and Puerto Rican *salseros*. *Timba*'s succession of rapped *coros*, recurring harmonic progressions, and bass/percussion gear schemes make many bands sound too much alike. Moreover, Cuba's socialist musical economy has been designed to minimize genericism through mass production. From the training of musicians to the naming and marketing of bands, Cuba's music industry emphasizes the public perception of a signature sound associated with each band. Even young fans can identify bands after a few *clave* cycles, zeroing in on features such as the rhythm section's prototypical grooves, a pianist's attack, *coro* contours, horn *mambos* or gear schemes.

Perna discusses the power struggles of band *sellos* between bandleaders and musicians:

¹³⁴ Max Paddison, ed., *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1996).

The emergence of solo singers represented a relative novelty for Cuban *música bailable*, which before the *período especial* had mainly identified with bands. Outfits such as Los Van Van or Adalberto Álvarez y su Son, for example, avoided the focalization on singers by using more than one vocalist, and were not fundamentally influenced by changes of personnel. The focusing of popular music on individual artists and the rise of the new pop stars of *música bailable* also affected the identity of established bands. From then on, the names of outfits such as Los Van Van, Irakere, and NG La Banda appeared steadily associated with those of their leaders, who thus proclaimed their rights to the artistic paternity and the economic ownership of the band. On records, the names became "Juan Formell y Los Van Van," "José Luís Cortés y NG La Banda," "David Calzado y La *Charanga* Habanera." The sole presence of the picture of their leader on record sleeves signaled that the band's components had become interchangeable.¹³⁵

Underpaid and exploited, most top level *timba* pianists serially play in multiple bands throughout their careers, ever searching for more equitable treatment and creative opportunities. To do this, they must assimilate each band's *sello*, learning previous pianists' *tumbaos* from recordings and live performances. Tethered by both previous *tumbaos* and the actual keyboards on which they were performed by previous pianists, new pianist band members are nonetheless expected to execute these *tumbaos* nonliterally, with significant extemporaneous or precomposed variations. They are also expected to create *tumbaos* for new songs following the band's *sello*. Through these processes of pre-existing *tumbao* memorization, variation, and new *tumbao* creation, pianists leave behind testaments to a musical power with which bandleaders must reckon, even after relationships sour. Thus, there is no *sello* without piano *tumbaos*. These

¹³⁵ Perna, *Sound*, 66.

tumbaos, in and of themselves, empower pianists, augment their prestige and confer upon them tangible negotiation leverage.

Timba's Social Contract

More than many other groove-based dance musics, *timba* fulfills its end of a particularly Cuban social contract that allows conservatory-trained musicians to make an exciting, engaging, and complex music while remaining close to the street's pulse and slang. Using dance music's historical mission to entertain while studding songs with biting social commentary on precarious contemporary Cuban life, *timba* repeats enough recognizable elements to maximize euphoria in its dancing constituency. That audience in turn entrusts *timba* bands to lead a groove and wave journey that includes catchy *coros*, modular gears, complex *tumbaos*, intricate horn section displays of virtuosic bravura, quotations of Afro-Cuban folklore, and references to American funk. Dancers let unfolding arrangements guide their movements while musicians tailor their arrangements to audience participation and feedback. *Timba's* blend of structure and freedom helps musicians feel challenged to reach new heights while grounded in their culture.

Pre-Timba Piano

In much Cuban popular music the piano, besides providing a harmonic guide, performs an essential rhythmic function by playing a sequence of arpeggiated chords called *tumbao*. This sequence follows a syncopated ostinato pattern usually two- or four-

bars long. The piano *tumbao*, which descends from *son*, derives from the adaptation of *tres* patterns. The *son tumbao*, which employs diatonic arpeggios played in octaves by both hands and stresses the first beat every two bars, has been widely adopted in *salsa* piano playing. The *tumbao* may be used by pianists sparsely and alternated with chords, or played throughout the whole piece. *Timba tumbaos* are faster, more irregular, percussive and syncopated, making use of passage notes, dissonances, and chromaticisms that show a remarkable jazz influence.¹³⁶

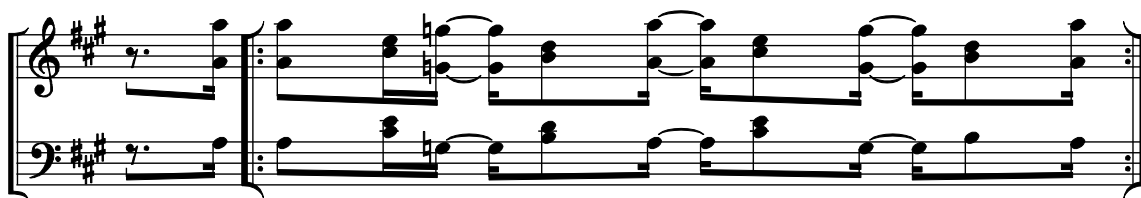
The *timba* pianist's gestural vocabulary is built upon a solid historical foundation, both in terms of the piano's ensemble function and the particular gestures it uses. Therefore, no analysis of *timba* piano creation and performance practice can be complete without some examination of Cuban piano's historical trajectory.

In most popular genres, piano, bass, *tres*, and violin parts articulated rhythmic cells associated with each genre. If this articulation was mainly arpeggiated, it was called a *tumbao*. If the articulation contained more scalar melodic material, it was called *guajeo*. Today, although *timba* piano contains both generic *tumbao* and song-specific *guajeo* elements, all repeating piano vamps are called *tumbaos*. From the 1950s to the 1970s, although the strophic narrative elements in popular song grew longer and more harmonically adventurous, *montunos* tended to remain harmonically sparse two to four-chord vamps articulated over one to two *claves*.

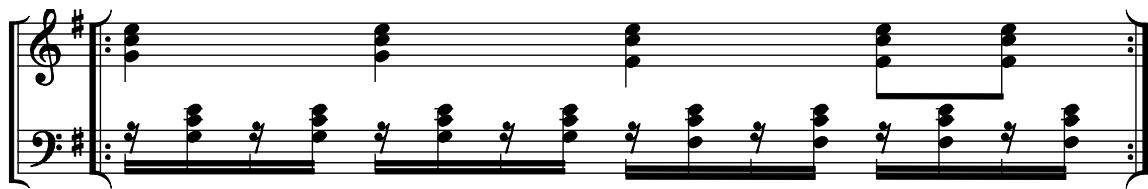
¹³⁶ Perna, *Sound*, 114-115.

Typical harmonic progressions included dominant tonic in major and minor, VII I in Mixolydian, circle of fifths progressions, and so forth. The following is a partial list of common pre-*timba* pianistic gestures also used in *timba*:

1. *Tres Style*, defined as single notes or octaves as main chord tones filled in with completed arpeggios. This style exemplifies the piano's closest connection to urban *son* and rural genres such as *changüí* and *nengón*. See “Arriba la Invasión” by Arcaño y sus Maravillas (8.1, below).



2. Chordal Style: The piano most directly imitates Afro-Cuban percussion, particularly sparse, syncopated lead drum phrases. See *chachachá*: “El Bodeguero” by Orquesta Aragón (8.2A, below), and “Oye Como Va” (8.2B, below).



Example 8.2B. “Oye Como Va” by Tito Puente, Carlos Santana, and Others



3. Motivo Style, in which piano, bass and other *montuno* instruments play in unison. This style exemplifies the difference between *guajeo* and *tumbao*. It is often used in *salsa* for bridges and pre-*mambo* interludes (example 8.3).

Example 8.3A. “Espíritu Burlón” by Orquesta Aragón



Example 8.3B. “Changüí Monte” by *Charanga* la Sensación with Abelardo Barroso, scored for piano, violins, and bass.

Example 8.1-8.3. Common Pre-*timba* Pianistic Gestures.

In this *montuno*, all three instruments play *guajeos* atop a dominant-tonic progression in C minor. Curiously, the violins articulate the same *mambo* cell as the piano on the *clave*'s 3-side, its downbeat coinciding with the *clave*. Since *mambo* cells were already expected to be on the 2-side, the violin part is contra-*clave*. Taken together, the piano and violin *guajeos* densely occupy nearly every N-cycle pulse. This composite dense texture occupying most or all N-cycle pulses may have inspired the *timba* piano practice of filling in non-accented metrical pulses with *notas rellenantes* (filler notes).

Timba Piano

Just as many *conga marchas* simulate rhythmic patterns played by multiple *congueros*, *timba* piano amalgamates the total contrapuntal effect of multiple instrument *tumbaos* or *guajeos*. Taking up every N-cycle pulse, *timba* piano *tumbaos* hierarchically accent important pitches and pulses. Most of these accents are realized through octave doubling in the right hand, spreading the hands apart by two octaves for a more brilliant sound. Single notes, arpeggios and closer registral hand divisions signal weaker metrical accents. Thus, the octave portions often constitute the main or “speaking” notes of *tumbaos*, simulating the older *guajeo*'s syncopated melodicism.

Harmonic Progressions

Timba piano navigates far more complex harmonic progressions than its genre forebearers. Rather than the functional triadic progressions common to *son*, *son-montuno*

and *guaracha*, *timba* progressions generally include jazz-based tritone substitutions, secondary ii-V approaches to functional triads as well as extended sonorities using augmented, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords. Nonfunctional triadic progressions, imitating late-1960s psychedelic rock, began appearing on Los Van Van's first six albums, forming *songo*'s emerging harmonic *sello*. Given Irakere's pianist/leader Chucho Valdés' jazz virtuosity, Irakere's output makes great use of jazz progressions. However, *songo*'s connection to psychedelic rock has been supplanted by *timba*'s main harmonic progression repository, 1970s American funk, pop, and fusion jazz such as Grover Washington, Earth Wind and Fire, the Yellow Jackets, and Weather Report. For instance, the progression from Grover Washington's "Just the Two Of Us" forms the *estribillo* of Charanga Habanera's "El Blablabla" and among many others.

Mixed Gesture *Tumbaos*

Mixed gesture *tumbaos* most easily distinguish *timba* piano from its antecedents. Even in Los Van Van's 1970s applications of *batá* rhythms to piano, each *tumbao* remained confined to a single gesture taken through the *montuno*'s chords. With longer harmonic progressions, single gesture *tumbaos* rapidly bored pianists, ushering in an aesthetic predilection for multiple gestures and periodicities cutting across metrical beats and barlines. These gestures include *tres* and chordal styles, repeated octave anacrusies, arpeggiated grace notes, manual contrapuntal independence, and *guajeo*-like melodic fragments.

Varied Repetition

Listening to studio and live *timba* recordings, one notices few identical iterations of a given *tumbao*. Whereas Cuban pianism previously cultivated the discipline of literal unchanging repetition, *timba* piano encourages varied repetition. In so doing, a gray area emerges, blurring varied pre-existing *tumbaos* with new ones. Strings of *tumbao* variations push the discursive repetition envelope to its limits, catapulting piano parts into outright narrativity. Variation strategies include: rhythmic doubling, replacement of consequent phrases with new ones, harmonic substitutions, motivic compression and displacement, decoration using diatonic and chromatic passing tones, polyrhythm, and increased gestural variety. One can thus take in a string of *timba tumbaos* over a repeating harmonic progression as a story in which the main gestural characters' relationships to each other expand, contract, and even rupture.

Musical Analyses

In the interest of brevity and clarity, I have restricted the ensuing musical examples to one opening *tumbao* and one outstanding variation for each song. Arranged chronologically, these *tumbaos* have been chosen to highlight gestural variety, different modalities and cyclical durations, harmonic environments, and rhythmic *clave* play. For the Roman numeral analyses, I have opted for the expanded system favored by most *timba* musicians in which both major and minor chords constructed on any diatonic scale degree can be named by changing the Roman numeral's case.

Example 8.4. “Por Qué Paró” 1 by Iván “Melón” González



This is the opening *tumbao* for Issac Delgado’s 1995 studio recording of “Por Qué Paró” played by Melón. Its harmonic progression exemplifies Peter Manuel’s concept of pendular tonality.¹³⁷ In progressions like these, melodic periodicities, rather than privileging one possible tonal center over another, leave the tonic ambiguous. This song’s tonic can be perceived both as G and C. If the mode is mixolydian, the progression is: I, VII, IV, V. If the tonality is major, the progression is: V, IV, I, II. Lasting two *claves*, this *tumbao* uses every sixteenth note in 4/4 except the downbeat of beat 3, corresponding to the *clave*’s 3-side. It is in harmonized *tres* style with octaves and chord tones alternating in the right hand a tenth above the left, which plays single notes. Also found in pre-*timba* piano, *tres* style is often harmonized in sixths and tenths, providing a ready-made, fully harmonized sound. Since the piano usually presents opening *tumbaos* with only *clave* and kick drum accompaniment, harmonized *tres* style is ideal.

¹³⁷ Manuel, 2003, 2008.

Example 8.5. “Por Qué Paró” 2 by Iván “Melón” González



Also predominantly in harmonized *tres* style, this *tumbao* showcases harmonic substitution as variation, extending the original two-*clave* cycle to four *claves*. The last two bars are harmonic substitutions for the opening two bars. In bar 1, beat 1, a chromatic motif is introduced in octaves. In bar 2, beat 3, a suspension on D7 is arpeggiated and resolved, while the bar concludes with repeated Es anticipating the relative minor substitution of the major tonic in bar 3. Bar 3, beat 2, introduces a plagal dominant tonicization of C via F7, suggesting blues tonality, before the D7 suspension concludes the *tumbao*, outlining the *clave*'s 3-side.

In rhythmic terms, this *tumbao*, like many others, is built around *rumba clave*, which delays the last 3-side pulse by an eighth or sixteenth note, (depending on notation). *Timba* pianists prefer to construct *tumbaos* around *rumba clave* because it is more conducive toward syncopation. This *tumbao* problematizes notions of *clave*

reinforcement versus *contra-clave*. *Contra-clave* conventions historically consisted of rhythmic phrases associated with one side of the *clave* being sounded on the other. Thus, the 3-side's opening tresillo sounded on the 2-side would be *contra-clave*. But beginning in the 1930s, downbeat placement on the *clave*'s 2-side became common and is no longer considered *contra-clave*. Yet here, the 3-side downbeats, (beats 3 of measures 1, 3 and 4) are sounded.

Harmonically, notwithstanding pitches on the 3-side, only beat 3 in measures 3 and 4 contain actual chord roots in one or both hands; the rest are prolongations of previous material. For instance, the first period in measure 1 extends from beat 2 through the first eighth of beat 3, making the A and G on beat 3 function as passing tones to the upcoming F. Similarly, the *tumbao*'s second period ranges from the second sixteenth of beat 4 through the second sixteenth of measure 2. Thus, there are seven sixteenths in the first two periods. In measure 2, beat 3, the D on the expected downbeat is syncopated by a sixteenth note, functioning as a pickup to the *clave*'s 3-side. Similarly, the last of the repeated E's approaching measure 3 deny the *clave*'s 2-side its customary downbeat. In measure 3, beats 1 and 2, the chordal figure on F 7 is a typical 2-side rhythmic trope. The *tumbao* concludes with a ii-V to G, extending the D 7 sonority into subsequent repetitions.

Example 8.6. “Romeo y Julieta” 1 by Eduardo “Chaka” Nápoles



This is the opening *tumbao* of Manolín González “Romeo Julieta,” slightly altered in this MIDI performance from the 1997 original. Unlike other *timberos*, the self-taught and vocally deficient Manolón González often talked or sang during the opening *tumbaos* of *montunos*, which may account for Chaka’s liberal use of arpeggiation. Lasting two *claves*, the progression is: I, VI-7-9-13, V, i in F minor. Like the previous Melón example, many of these chords are introduced before or after downbeats. The tonic chord in measure 1 arrives after beat 1, while the VI and V chords anticipate downbeats. The notation given here is faithful to Chaka’s studio performance rather than the MIDI file he performed. In the MIDI file, the running sixteenth arpeggios are articulated as offbeat triplets beginning on the sixteenths following downbeats. This *tumbao* contains three gestures: arpeggiated tenths, a left-hand rootless jazz voicing and a conclusion in *tres* style. Rootless voicings and triplet displacements are hallmarks of Chaka’s style. Although *salsa* pianists like Sonora Ponceña’s Papo Luca use these voicings in more rhythmically tame *tumbaos*, Chaka adapts them to the *timba* context.

Example 17. “Romeo y Julieta” 2 by Eduardo “Chaka” Nápoles



This is the song's second *tumbao*, arriving after a *mambo* and initially played against a *presión* gear. Lasting two *claves*, its autotelic harmonic progression is: VI-7-9-13, V, i, IV in F minor. This *tumbao*'s alignment with *rumba clave* partially accounts for harmonic resolutions before and after downbeats. The D-flat 7 9 left-hand rootless voicing from the first *tumbao* is repeated, though situated in a different gestural milieu. In measure 1, the hands are no more than an eleventh apart, but this spread is increased to two octaves in measure 2, neatly dividing the *tumbao* into two textures. This division is reinforced by measure 1 being in rootless harmonized style and measure 2 in classic *tres* style. Rhythmically, a number of micro-level asymmetries occur. The D-flat 7 chord is expressed by an oscillation between the rootless voicing's extremities followed by its inner notes. However, it is rhythmically realized by displacing the typical isochronous

bell or *güiro* pattern in example 6. This pattern repeats four times before the harmony and gesture changes on C 7. The last two beats of measure 2 are a typical use of suspension over a dominant. B-flat 7 is initially articulated as A-flat major or F minor 7.

Example 8.8. “Sube y Baja” 1 by Tirso Duarte



This song first appeared on the newly reformed Charanga Habanera’s 1999 album, *Charanguero Mayor*. The *tumbao*’s creator, a young and prodigious Tirso Duarte, was even then a gifted pianist, vocalist, and arranger. His *tumbaos* represent the younger generation’s aesthetic of gestural saturation. Inextricably tied to the song’s opening *coro*, the *tumbao* first appears in the *introducción* quoting the *montuno*’s first *coro*. This practice of teasing the audience with the main *coro* before the *cuerpo* is widespread among *timba* bands and was pioneered by José Luis Cortés and NG La Banda. It allows bandleaders to test new songs’ reception by gauging audience response to the main *coro*

before the song proper even begins. Coupled with the *coro*'s return at the beginning of the *estribillo*, the *tumbao* is played over a quick gear sequence, formulaic for Charanga Habanera, of *presión* into *mazacote*. Its use of parallel thirds, scalar passages, and a daringly wide melodic leap at the beginning is facilitated by the bass and percussion gear against which it is played. Unencumbered by *marcha*'s interlocking percussion patterns and this song's bass lines, the *tumbao*'s subtleties take center stage. Its many gestures complement *conguero* Orlando Mengual's *pilón*-based *mazacote* improvisations.

The *tumbao*'s cycle lasts two *claves* and contains the progression: I, IV, II, III, vi, V-sus in A-flat major. In the pickup to measure 1 and conclusion of measure 4, melodic treatment gives this *tumbao* a *guajeo* flavor. The opening gambit (B-flat, A-flat, E-flat, D-flat, C) is unique in Cuban popular music, since it is an uncommon melodic cell. The parallel thirds surrounding beat 2 of measure 1 are generally considered by *timba* pianists to be suitable for *presión* or pedal gears because of diminished percussion density compared to *marcha*. The A-flat arpeggio on beat 3 of measure 1 pays instantly recognizable homage to Los Van Van pianist César "Pupy" Pedrosa," with whom Tirso Duarte sang after Pupy left Van Van to form Los Que Son Son. *Tres* style takes over from beat 4 of measure 1 through measure 2. In measure 3, the opening phrase's consequent returns in parallel thirds, as does the tenths arpeggio on beat 3 of measure 3. Measure 4 concludes with a filled-in *mambo* rhythmic cell and a scalar run returning to the cyclical anacrusis.

Example 8.9. “Sube y Baja” 2 by Tirso Duarte



This is the song’s densest *tumbao*, used throughout its final pair of climactic *coros* and played atop many iterations of Charanga Habanera’s gear sequence. The *tumbao* makes compelling use of traditional *mambo* rhythmic cells as well as innovative blues idioms and parallel minor modal mixture. Based on the opening *tumbao*’s harmonic progression, this *tumbao* complicates the sequence without elongating its cyclical length: I, I⁷⁺, IV⁷, III, vi, II, iv⁶, V^{sus}.

The pickup to measure 1 as well as its first two beats constitute two seven-sixteenth phrases, grouped 3+4. However, the rhythmic placement of this pickup displaces the seven-note phrase by a sixteenth. On beat 4 of measure 1, the ascending scalar phrase beginning on A-flat breaks the previous two-octave-wide *tres* style treatment and gives way to more bluesy *tres* style in measure 2, this tie with the hands

only an octave apart. Two-octave-wide *tres* style returns on beat 4 of measure 2. On beat 3 of measure 3, an isochronous phrase in parallel thirds, usually associated with the *clave*'s 2-side, is here placed on the 3-side. In measure 4, the "Oye Como Va" *mambo* cell from example 11 uses the chord's inner notes to fill in the pitches accentuated by the right-hand octaves.

This admittedly minuscule sample of *timba* piano hopefully attests to the genre's depth and breadth. Although the gestural taxonomy presented here is temptingly consistent, *timba* pianists claim many other *tumbao* creation influences including Afro-Cuban rhythms, fragments from piano soloing vocabulary and brief quotations from Western classical pieces. The *timba* pianist is hyper aware of each potential note's position inside and outside binary and ternary metrical grids, the *clave*, the *tumbao*'s hypermeasures and micro-level diatonic rhythms. This study has attempted to underscore the vital work with melody, harmony, and rhythm often thanklessly done by *timba* pianists in and out of Cuba. However, a loftier aim might involve non-*timba* musicians drawing upon any conceptual approaches detailed here as well as those yet to be uncovered

What *Timba* Teaches

As Western ethnomusicologists and theorists continue researching and analyzing non-Western traditional and popular musics, terminologies and musical values often collide. Emic and etic concepts compete with each other for clarity and analytical

authenticity. *Timba*'s classically trained pianists, bassists, horn players, and percussionists have already bridged the translation chasm between Cuba and the West's rich musical patrimonies. In his introduction to *Unlocking the Groove*, Mark Butler makes one of the most compelling cases for intensive theoretical analysis of electronic dance music.¹³⁸ Both Butler's enthusiasm and that of his musician informants attest to the enjoyment and sheer pleasure of laying bare the intricacies and even thorny problems of musical complexity. Butler's work demonstrates that one can analyze groove-based dance musics using a hefty arsenal of metrical theory without destroying its essence. In my experience, *timba* pianists have welcomed my endeavors to do the same.

Conclusion

The story of *timba* piano spans an evolution from generic rhythmic cells and functionally triadic harmonic progressions to song-specific *tumbaos*, dense chromatic harmony, and modular variation techniques. Longer harmonic progressions have compelled *timba* pianists to augment their instrument's historical gestural vocabulary with elements from folkloric rhythms and traditional Cuban piano soloing techniques, creating *tumbaos* that do more than rhythmically arpeggiate functional harmony. On a micro-level, *timba* piano's rhythmic, harmonic, and textural structural variety mirrors macro-level aspects of ensemble performance including vocal *coro/soneo* alternation, horn *mambos* and bass/percussion gear schemes. Participating in a polyrhythmic *clave*-

¹³⁸ Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, Introduction.

based web, piano *tumbaos* playfully withhold and deliver rhythmic expectations as do vocal wordplay or percussion breaks.

Well-educated, curious, eclectic and virtuosic, but often exploited, *timba* pianists' powerful contributions to bands' signature sounds empower ordinary working musicians, writing them into musical perpetuity.

AFTERWORD

I began this work with the objective of documenting Cuban pianism's history and stylistic evolution by synthesizing etic and emic analytical frameworks from ethnomusicology and music theory around a sound-centered approach to musical thought, creation, and appreciation. I suggest that Cuban/Latin piano in general, and *montuneo* in particular, grapples with questions of ethnicity, race, class, nationalism, globalism, and authenticity. In crafting a theoretical framework in which to conceptualize and demystify the piano *tumbao* within the broader context of the Cuban/Latin musical system's many overlapping genres, stylistic features, and assimilation of cosmopolitan influences, this work presents an analytical alternative to traditional ethnomusicological sociocultural paradigms, focusing more on musical creativity, imagination, and risk taking in improvisation. Further, I argue that the cultivation of *cubaneo* in Latin piano has centered around repertoires without borders moving from placed based engagement to deterritorialized and hence aestheticized musical forms still requiring human relationships and trust to be performed by both cultural insiders and outsiders. Cuban/Latin music, as a global, transnational phenomenon now requires updated paradigms in order to understand and value musicians' simultaneously collective and intensely individual aesthetic choices.

Towit, I have presented a three-layered organizational schema for thinking about Cuban/Latin music: vocabularies, repertoires, and abstract procedures. Applying this

framework to the many musical mixtures including global *salsa*, contemporary Cuban *timba* and Latin jazz, I have retheorized musical mixture using this parametric model augmented by an attitudinal continuum of musical mixing that ranges between affinity, antipathy, and necessity. In terms of musical form and structure, both these analytical models seek to define how cyclical Cuban/Latin piano *montunos* (or *tumbaos*) can also accommodate linear narrativic stylistic features including gestural/textural variety, harmonic substitution, rhythmic displacement and motivic development, all adhering to the Cuban *clave*'s rules for stress, and cadence. Not only do Cuban and Latin musicians often manifest these principles in their musical output, they also occasionally talk about their musical procedures in ways that transcend clichés of cultural patrimonies or innate osmosis.

More importantly, however, my own musical trajectory has been shaped by the application of these principles to attentive listening, practice, performance, pedagogy, and scholarship. As a totally blind New York-born non-Cuban Hispanic Italian who has worked with Cuban, Puerto Rican, Nuyorican and other Latin musicians, my personal quest for that streetwise yet elegant *cubaneo* has compelled me to think about how Cuban/Latin music is felt, made, and understood via studio recordings, live performances, jam sessions, rehearsals, and songwriting/arranging collaborations. My Spanish fluency and lifetime around Cuban and Latin music have facilitated this work's research methodologies: formal interviews, informal conversations, and years of shared bandstands. However, my copious cataloging and listening to a century of Cuban and

Latin recorded music, combined with years of disciplined creative practice, have produced a degree of musical mastery that has opened doors to musicians' "trade secrets" and specialized knowledge. Although highly theoretical, this work's main impetus has been action-based—the "doing" of music on different levels in the real world where Cuban/Latin musicians, steeped in tradition yet craving innovation, decide what to play next.

Moreover, as a member of this Latin musician community, congenital blindness shapes my daily life in practical, psychological, and spiritual ways that my sighted musical peers rarely experience. Blindness has certainly heightened my remaining senses in order to compensate for my lack of sight. However, the practical difficulties of living sightless in a sighted world have forced me to develop my own ways of making music and doing scholarship. The unavailability of Braille musical arrangements has necessitated a unique kind of hearing akin to how sighted readers cognitively process words while skimming text. In contrast to the myriad situations in which today's adaptive technologies require extra time and patience, my aural discernment gives me a nearly instantaneous rush of sensory information primarily through sound.

For instance, as the downbeat of a cowbell on a Cuban/Latin music recording seems catapulted into the ether, I hear much more than its rhythmic transient; I hear its pitch and timbral quality. If I hear it located toward my left or right ear rather than in the middle of my head, I deduce that this recording is stereophonic rather than monophonic. Different kinds of surface noise on historical recordings can help me pin down its exact

decade of production; the frequency spectrum and equalization curve can even identify the record label. The cowbell's thick or thin tone tells me to the size and weight of the stick used to sound it, as well as the general area of the cowbell's mouth producing its distinctive sound. Multiplying this kind of hearing by all the vocal and instrumental combinations found in Cuban/Latin music, in various genres, by various artists and recorded at different times, a second of music encapsulates an entire band playing a thin portion of their vast memory archive.

As to notation, I have recently begun to verbalize my listening process in real time, as evident in many of the musical examples throughout this work, especially in chapter 7, where the audio clips are augmented by realtime voiceover narration. This is my way of inviting interested readers and listeners to learn to hear the Cuban/Latin music memory archive as I and generations of musicians have done.

Since my musical memory shares that archive, my listening also brings to mind the ways I have handled the same live musical situations. Like the young *batá* players with whom I was initiated to sacred consecrated drums, I too improvise conversations as *orisha* spirit possession grips a hot sweaty room in Havana or the Bronx. Like the late Pancho Quinto or Los Chinitos de Cuba, I play *rumba guarapachangueo* on an array of percussion instruments in a circle surrounding me. Like the late great Cuban pianist Lili Martínez or the living legendary Puerto Rican pianist Papo Lucca, I play ornate chromatic piano runs, arpeggios, and dense jazz voicings in *boleros* and largo sections of *son montunos*. Like César "Pupy" Pedroso, I move both hands in contrary motion

arpeggios on Los Van Van's "Te Pone la Cabeza Mala," inserted into a swinging *salsa* version of "La Macarena". Like Iván "Melón" Lewis, whom I interviewed for this project, I improvise garlands of variations around the original *tumbao* for Issac Delgado's "No Me Mires a los Ojos." In nightclubs and at outdoor festivals, I too changed a *timba tumbao* from a three octave-based texture to parallel tenths as a lead singer, with a word or gesture, brings down the rhythm section's aggressive intensity to a feathery light bed upon which he raps to an eager crowd.

In all these instances, there has been an imperative to create something spontaneous and new within a vibrant tradition as a performer, and all of this has enhanced my deep understanding of Cuban/Latin music making as a music scholar. Just as Cuban/Latin musicians learn to follow our own knowledge and intuition to play things like no one else, blindness has taught me to forge my own path through sight-dominant ethnomusicology and music theory scholarship. Where my colleagues mark up reserved library monographs with comments and drawings, I copy memorable text into a file. Where other scholars can safely plunge into exotic environments in distant countries, I have used the internet to bring the world to me, interviewing Cuban/Latin musicians across oceans and continents. These adaptations and workarounds have allowed me to make a precarious home in a scholarly world full of notated scores and graphs, video documentaries with silent credits, and participant/observation methodologies privileging what the eyes rather than the hands or ears observe. Mine is truly embodied vs. mental knowledge.

In this context I argue that as our scholarly world becomes more technologically interconnected, ethnomusicology and music theory should be reconfigured so that subsequent generations of blind and otherwise disabled scholars have an easier time building their own sound-centered edifices in a truly inclusive, disability friendly environment where adaptive and assisted devices fascinate rather than baffle. Just as Cuban/Latin musicians codify and systematize new rules according to our inner creative vision, so can differently abled scholars create our own rules of engagement in environments that work with us rather than against us, with people who empathize rather than retreat.

In 2014, I interviewed the renowned Rafael Ithier, Puerto Rican pianist, arranger and leader of one of salsa's most enduringly successful institutions, El Gran Combo. Ten years earlier, my Cuban-style charanga opened for El Gran Combo, playing courtly danzones at a fancy Philadelphia hotel. Between sets, Rafael Ithier spotted me in the crowd, threw his arms around me, greeted me, and introduced me to the rest of the band. We had never met before, but Ithier must have heard about me on his years playing with my father, Henry Fiol, on arena stages throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Europe.

After we talked for while and the band prepared to take the stage, Ithier turned to me and said, "Come. Sit beside me on stage and you can play piano on one of our tunes." Before I could clumsily select an appropriate face to express my joy, I was sitting onstage to Ithier's right as El Gran Combo expertly performed their greatest hits. In between songs, I could hear Ithier literally thinking to himself, softly playing fast sequences of

secondary dominant chords and upper extension jazz voicings, which I later learned, he taught himself. His *montuneo* was not Cuban in a contemporary sense, bursting with *timba* piano's gestural/textural saturation; it was tradition incarnate, tasty and sweet, right on the money, deep in a well worn pocket, locked in a groove that only time and experience could chisel.

And then, during the encore, it happened in a flash. Ithier grabbed me and gruffly asked, "We're going to play "Mas Timbal Para Los Rumberos; do you know the head?" I responded in the negative, not having prepared in advance for such an eventuality. "No problem," said Ithier, "I'll play the head and then you slide right on in." When that montuno took off, Ithier and I quickly switched places on his piano bench, with no apprehension or awkwardness. As I began to play, I could literally feel myself going back in time with this music, with this record that came out before I was born, and I was playing the music with some of the musicians who recorded it. I'll never forget how Ithier stood behind me, pounding the rhythm section's upcoming breaks with his open palms on my shoulders.

On that stage, my blindness did not intrude. My obscure performing, recording, and arranging career was momentarily out of my hands, protected in the embrace of these warm and amiable elderly musical giants. I have no idea how I must have looked, beaming and grinning, making faces that I had never consciously learned or named, entirely present in public but also in my own private world where the Cuban/Latin musical archive became living flesh as I played notes in time. After the gig, my guys told

me that El Gran Combo's bassist and *conguero* were nodding and smiling, open mouthed, during that *montuno*. I had played it in a subdued Cuban style, slightly changing and varying it through each repetition. I may have used more chromatic decorations and rootless voicing than Ithier would, but it all worked.

Ten years later, I was in my fourth year of dissertation research, in the large bedroom of a hundred-year-old West Philly Victorian house that I had dubbed "my maintenance nightmare," with a hard disc recorder perched beside a patched-in cordless telephone, making another dream come true, interviewing Maestro Rafael Ithier. We had played telephone tag for weeks; I would call when he wasn't home or he would come to the phone after just having picked up his wife from the airport. But now, on an otherwise lackluster afternoon, we were talking shop.

I learned that due to arthritis, Ithier had stopped playing piano with his beloved combo, hiring the young Puerto Rican pianist William Sotello. Ithier was friendly and gracious, composing his thoughts and delivering them with folksy *jíbaro* humility. He patiently answered my questions about his autodidactic musical training, El Gran Combo's early years with exiled Dominican singer Joseíto Mateo, then Pellín Rodríguez and Andy Montañez, down to the band's two vocal mainstays for the past forty years, Jerry Rivas and Charlie Aponte. We talked about how Ithier voiced his five-piece horn section of two trumpets, two alto saxophones and a lone trombone. We talked about the influence of traditional Puerto Rican genres such as trova, bomba and plena on Ithier's first arrangements with Rafael Cortijo, as well as El Gran Combo's recent hit "Arroz con

Habichuelas” (rice and beans), composed by a Cuban songwriter who defected to Puerto Rico.

Then, after a lull in my questioning, as I savored this moment for as long as I could, Rafael Ithier said this:

As advice, I will tell you this: Keep pushing forward because you have youth and talent. What you have to do is continue doing what you understand, what you want to do. For example, people tell us to try reggaeton. I applaud people who sing reggaeton, but what does that have to do with salsa? Absolutely nothing. We keep playing our thing; no mixtures here; none of that. It's simply the Gran Combo as it is. That doesn't mean we won't try a new idea here and there; we adapt to it. But we try to keep the group in the same style. We do the best according to our understanding and our capacity. We don't try to do what we can't do. You see? In your case, you are our music's future. Since you have the preparation, use it for your own benefit and for the genre's benefit. See? You have all the talent in the world. Naturally, we're living in different times, but even being different, things can still be accomplished if you insist upon it. Don't let yourself be swayed by people who say you've done something badly. Simply, stick to your criteria, what your mind tells you. Tell yourself, "This is what I want to do." If it functions, good; if it doesn't work, then find another way. Understand? But let it be your own criteria, not mine or someone else's. Because that's how life comes. You do something today and I say you shouldn't have done that. But it turns out that what you did was right after all. You must always think about your own criteria, what you can and want to do. If you fail, try to improve or change it. But let it always be your choice; that's the most important part. And as far as I'm concerned, you can always call me in confidence. I always praise youthful and good talent because that's the future in your hands, this genre's future that will never die. It has loosened its hold a bit, but it will never die. So, keep moving forward.¹³⁹

I have followed Rafael's advice, even when my criteria favor much more musical mixture than he prefers, even when my research methodologies have seemed heretical and met resistance. I have followed his advice, still blind, relocating from Philadelphia to

¹³⁹ Rafael Ithier, interview with author, 11 August 2014.

Charlotte, North Carolina, knowing no one, with my parents still living in New York City. Most important right now, I have followed Ithier's advice, composing an inherently imperfect work with too few notated musical examples, interview quotations, and scholarly citations. As have many scholars before me, I bear full responsibility for this work's shortcomings. Yet, like the musicians who shared their time and knowledge with me, like my students on whom I tried out the very same parametric paradigms presented here, and like my fellow Latin musicians, standing between the doorways of Latino and Western cultures. Every day, with every note we perform and record, with every "what if" experiment we embrace or discard, with every new gesture or texture we think we have invented, we are constantly making decisions and choices, as fragments of our sonic archive spin around our brains and mess with our minds. Right or wrong, logical or whimsical, these decisions and choices start out as ours but gradually become part of the world. But once those notes sound, we spread our hands in a new configuration and let everything go.

APPENDIX

SOUND EXAMPLES AND INTERVIEWS

I. SOUND EXAMPLES:

Audio Example 3.01

Title: Jula Jekere

Artist: Alhaji Bai Konte

Album: Kora Melodies from Gambia, track 10

Audio Example 3.02:

Author: Amanda Villepastour

Title: Ewe (Batá Ensemble)

Album: Ancient Text Messages of the Yaruba Batá Drum

Ayan (Born) Drummers of the Yoruba (Southwest Nigeria) Playing Ena Batá, A Drummed Speech Surrogacy System, A Coded Spoken Language, track 1

Year: 2010

Audio Example 3.10 (p.267): *Descarga* versión of “A Buscar Camarón”

Audio Example 3.11 (p.269): “El Ratón”

Audio Example 5.01:

Title: Esto Te Pone La Cabeza Mala-first part

Artist: Los Van Van

Album: Te Pone La Cabeza Mala, track 1

Year: 1997

Audio Example 5.02 (p.187):

Title: Rosa que no se marchita- (O López)

Artist: Antonio Arcaño y sus Maravillas

Year: 1941

Audio Example 5.03 (p.200):

Title: Quiendembo Jazz

Artist: Arsenio Rodriguez y su Conjunto

Album: Arsenio Dice, track 10

Year: 1968

Audio Example 5.04 (p.201):

Title: Ogún

Artist: Manley "Piri" López Herrera

Album: Clases de Batá: Oru Cantado
Year: 2011

Audio Example 5.05 (p.210):
Title: Bonito Amanecer
Artist: Henry Fiol (featuring Orlando Fiol on piano, keyboards, and backing vocals)
Album: Creativo, track 3
Year: 1991

Audio Example 5.06 (p.221):
Title: Plástico
Artist: Rubén Blades and Willie Colón
Album: Siembra, track 1 (opening)
Year: 1978

Audio Example 5.07:
Title: Conga Qaedas
Artist: Orlando Fiol and Friends
Album: Negotiating Beauty: Live Performance at Philadelphia's Painted Bride Arts Center
Year: 2003

Audio Example 5.08:
Title: El Tostón
Artist: Eusebio Nieves and the Kind Buds (featuring Orlando Fiol on piano, sampled bass, analog synthesizers, congas, and vocals)
Album: Eubilicious, track 7
Year: 2010

Audio Example 6.01:
Title: Tengo Que Olvidarte
Artist: Arsenio Rodríguez y su Conjunto
Album: Complete RCA Recordings 1940-1956: Disc 2 (1944-1946)
Year: 1946 (Recorded 12/13/46)

Audio Example 6.02:
Title: Tengo Que Olvidarte
Artist: Manuel Guajiro Mirabal
Album: Manuel Guajiro Mirabal, track 7
Year: 2004

Audio Example 7.1 (p.257):
 Title: Cinquillo Pattern in Duple Meter
 Artist: Orlando Fiol
 Album: Dissertation Audio, track 1
 Year: 2018

Audio Example 7.2 (p.257):
 Title: Nengón Pattern in Duple Meter
 Artist: Orlando Fiol
 Album: Dissertation Audio, track 2
 Year: 2018

Audio Example 7.3 (p.258):
 Title: Rotated Cinquillo Pattern Forms Nengón Pattern
 Artist: Orlando Fiol
 Album: Dissertation Audio, track 3
 Year: 2018

Audio Example 7.4 (p.258):
 Title: Amphibrach Pattern- Double Rotation of Cinquillo
 Artist: Orlando Fiol
 Album: Dissertation Interviews: Nengón Across Latin Music Genres, track 4
 Year: 2018

Audio Example 7.5 (p.261):
 Title: Música Del Nangón (Prototypical Nengón Figure)
 Artist: La Familia Valera Miranda
 Album: Antología Integral Del Son, track 5
 Year: 1988

Audio Example 7.6 (p.261):
 Title: Nengón Para Ti (Traditional Rural Nengón with Vocal Refrain and Verses)
 Artist: La Familia Valera Miranda
 Album: Antología Integral Del Son, Volume 1, track 7
 Year: 1988

Audio Example 7.7 (p.263):
 Title: Soy Labori (The Nengón Motif in Traditional Son)

Artist: Mi Nuevo Son
 Album: Live at Changüí festival
 Year: 2007

Audio Example 7.8 (p.265):
 Title: Zumba (Clavecized Nengón in Cuban Conjunto)
 Artist: Arsenio Rodriguez y su Conjunto
 Album: Complete RCA Recordings 1940-1956: Disc 5 (1950-1951), track 18
 Year: 04/03/1951

Audio Example 7.9:
 Title: Alto Songo (Clavecized and Clave-Neutral Nengón Motifs in Conjunto)
 Artist: Félix Chappottín y sus Estrellas
 Year: 1950s

Audio Example 7.10 (p.266):
 Title: A Buscar Camarones (Nengón in Cuban Descarga)
 Artist: Israel "Cachao" López
 Album: Descargas Cubanas, track 9
 Year: 1958

Audio Example 7.11 (p.263):
 Title: El Ratón (Nengón in 1960s New York Salsa Piano)
 Artist: Joe Cuba Sextet featuring Cheo Feliciano
 Year: 1960s

Audio Example 7.12 (p.263):
 Title: Soy Boricua (Nengón in early 1970s New York Salsa)
 Artist: Bobby Valentín
 Album: Soy Boricua, track 1
 Year: 1973

Audio Example 7.13 (p.271):
 Title: Juliana (Nengón in Dominican Salsa Piano Kubaney 412-2T)
 Artist: Cuco Valoy y sus Beduinos
 Album: Epoca De Oro, track 4
 Year: 1995

Audio Example 7.14 (p.272):
 Title: Tan Haragán (Nengón in Contemporary New York Salsa Piano)
 Artist: Henry Fiol
 Album: Ciudadano del Mundo, track 6

Year: 2012

Audio Example 7.15:

Title: El Guararé de Pastora

Artist: Grupo Changüí de Guantánamo (original members Chito Latamblé, Cambrón, and Pedro Speck)

Album: Live in Cuba (1989), track 2

Audio Example 7.16:

Title: Llegué Llegué, track 1

Artist: Los Van Van

Album: 1974

Year: 1974

Audio Example 7.17:

Title: Guararé

Artist: Ray Barretto

Album: Salsa Caliente De Nu York!, track 3

Year: 2001

II. INTERVIEWS

Andy González (September 16, 2014)

01 Introduction

02 Ethnicity and Pianism

03 Early Musical Formation and Motown Bass

04 Arsenio Rodríguez Baby Bass Anecdote

05 René López's Record Collection

06 Popular Bands During the 1960s

07 Recording with Willie Colón and Rubén Blades

08 Grupo Folklórico Experimental Nuyorquino and Faina Records

09 Alfredo Chocolate Armenteros

10 Formation of Conjunto Libre

11 Jerry González Cuban-Centered Approach to Conga

12 Conjunto Libre's Enduring Rhythm Section

Benjamin Lápido (September 11, 2013)

01 Early Exposure to Latin Jazz and Folklore

02 Salsa, Improvisation and Formative Codifications of Musical Style

03 Learning Multiple Instruments

04 Tres Traditions and Jazz Innovations

05 Lili and Peruchín

06 Different Kinds of Cubaneo

Carlos Caro (December 2, 2014)

01 Introduction

02 Cuban and Latin American Popular Music Influences

03 Cuban and Latin American Popular Music Variants

04 Traditional Bongó Influences and Early Experiences with Opus 13

Cana Oliva (2011)

Carlos Alberto Núñez Valdés (from la Sublime) (2011)

Ernesto Oviedo (2011)- Part 1 and 2

Guillermo Rubalcaba (2011)

Julio Cesar Barosso García

Orlando Jesús Pérez Montero, pianist of Orquesta Aragón (December, 2011)

02 Musical Example- Cachita

03 Montuneo and Arrangement Sections

04 Piano Accompaniment as Melodic Line

05 Musical Example- Almendra (danzón)

06 Musical Example- El Bodeguero (chachachá)

07 Musical Example- Nosotros (bolero-chachachá)

09 Musical Example- Te Comiste El Mango (timba montuno)

10 Classical Training and Aesthetic Influences

12 Popular Pianistic, Jazz and Salsa Influences

13 Traditional and Folkloric Influences

15 Pianistic Accommodations to Strings in Charanga

17 Distinctions Between Charanga and Conjunto

18 Pianistic Versus Flautistic Soloing Styles

19 Musical Demonstration of Flute Soloing Style

20 Favorite Charanga Pianists

21 Charanga's Recent Decline in Cuba

22 Unison and Harmonized Vocals in Charanga

23 Arrangers, Pianists and Ensemble Teamwork

24 Arranging, Composing and Teaching Trajectories

25 Timba's Monotony Versus Genre Variety

26 Musical Example- Lo Que Tiene Ella (timba montuno)

Danny Rosales Castro (September 4, 2014)

- 01 Welcome
- 02 Ethnic Distinctions in Pianism
- 03 Initial Influences
- 04 Foreign Musical Influences on Colombian Record Collectors and Musicians
- 05 Colombian Crossover Radio
- 06 Salsa's Arrival and Appeal in Colombia
- 07 Fruco y sus Tesos
- 08 Jairo Varela
- 09 Formative Professional Experiences

Elizabeth Sobol (September 14, 2012)

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Marketing Latin Music to the Anglo Performing Arts Audience
- 03 Club Versus Concert Settings
- 04 The Curious NPR Crowd
- 05 Problems Managing Cuban Bands Touring the U.S.
- 06 Playing for the Cubaneo Crowd
- 07 Longing For the Indigenous Audience
- 08 Sound Levels
- 09 Sound Levels and the NPR Crowd
- 10 Marketing To Indie Hipsters and the Importance of Narrative
- 11 Tiempo Libre's Narrative- Eclectic Timba With Roots Planted In America
- 12 The Vitality of Transnational Hybridity
- 13 The Complex Dynamic Between Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Nuyorican Musical Aesthetics
- 14 Closing

Gilberto el Pulpo Colón Jr. (June 18, 2013)

- 01 Cubaneo In My Piano Playing with Henry Fiol
- 02 Early Musical Formation- Música Jíbara and Bugalú
- 03 Cubaneo and Clave
- 04 Cubaneo In Larry Harlow's Pianism
- 05 Cubaneo and Simplicity
- 06 Jazz
- 07 Simplicity and Ego
- 08 Master Cuban Pianists and Racism
- 09 Respecting The Idiom
- 10 Pianistic Cleanliness
- 11 Travel and Foreign Musical Influences on Contemporary Cuban Pianism
- 12 Eddie Palmieri

- 13 Conservatism In Salsa
- 14 Contemporary Cuban Modernism and the Concert Audience
- 15 Papo Luca y la Sonora Ponceña
- 16 Developing An Individual Voice with Héctor Lavoe
- 17 Harmonic Modernizations
- 18 Dynamics and Articulation
- 19 Musical Demonstration- El Cantante- Cuerpo
- 20 Gradual Development
- 21 Musical Demonstration- El Cantante- Montuno
- 22 Varying Ensemble Intensity During Montunos and Mambos
- 23 Registration
- 24 Teaching
- 25 Pianistic Growth
- 26 Jazz Versus Montuno's Deceptive Simplicity
- 27 Willie Colón

Henry Theodore Fiol (February 28, 2013)

- 01 Early History
- 02 Boogaloo
- 03 New York Conjuntos
- 04 First Performance Experiences
- 05 Saoco, Original Composition and the Three Main Streams of Cuban Popular Music
- 06 Original Composition Within Cuban Típico Stylistic Structures
- 07 An Artist's Entire Oeuvre
- 08 Arranging Without Reading Music
- 09 Song-Specific Arranging
- 10 The Application of Rumba, Hocketing and Interlocking Guajeos from Cuban Campechino Music
- 11 Individual Aesthetic Focus and Evolution, Isolated From External Influences
- 12 Fan Awareness of Guajeos As Hooks
- 13 Economy, Simplicity and Cathiness
- 14 Working Versus Pickup Bands- Generic Versus Song-Specific Guajeos
- 15 Style, Tradition and the Analytical Mind
- 16 Hooks and Instrumentation
- 17 Guajeos and Gears
- 18 Internal Clave Sense in Cuban, Puerto Rican and New York Musicians
- 19 Notable Exceptions
- 20 Giggling with Pickup Musicians
- 21 Cuban Musicians of Different Generations' Attitudes Toward Their Musical Roots In Henry Fiol's Sound
- 22 The Political Reasons for Cuban-Based Music and Nuyorican Salsa's Lack of Exposure in Puerto Rico

- 23 Clicking in Colombia
- 24 Cuban Music in Mexico
- 25 Race and Class Relations in Columbia
- 26 Message Versus Romantic Lyrics and Lighter Musical Elements such as Doo-Wop, Jazz and Brazilian
- 27 The American Light Musical Aesthetic Versus Latin Loudness
- 28 The Stylistic Influence of Charangas Callejeras, Música Campecina, Bosa Nova and Light Jazz

Iván Melón Lewis (9/24/13)

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Cubaneo in Early Latin Piano
- 03 Afro-Cuban Folklore and Cuban Popular Dance Music
- 04 Popular Music in Cuba's Conservatory System
- 05 Classical Music, Piano Technique and Timba's Evolution
- 06 Geraldo Piloto's Influence on Timba Piano's Gestural&Textural Vocabulary
- 07 Interpreting Precomposed Notated Piano Tumbaos Interactively and Reactively to the Rhythm Section
- 08 Cuban Timba's Roots in Irakere and NG La Banda
- 09 Issac Delgado's 1990s Timba Project
- 10 Speculation On Issac's Motives For Leaving NG La Banda
- 11 The Circumstances Surrounding Melon's Dismissal From Issac Delgado's Band and his Relocation to Spain
- 12 Issac Delgado's Post-1998 Band
- 13 Individuality in the Collective Signature Sound of Issac Delgado's Post-1998 Bands
- 14 Daily Rehearsals Versus Notation in Issac Delgado's Band
- 15 Nonliteral Repetition and Variation in Cuban Piano Tumbaos- Props to Peruchin
- 16 Cuban Pianists' Chameleon-like Ability To Interpret Each Other's Styles
- 17 Other Timba Pianists- Juan Carlos Gonzalez, el Chaka and Tirso Duarte
- 18 Manolito Simonet and Adalberto Alvarez- Balancing Tradition and Timba
- 19 Pupy Pedroso y Los Que Son Son's Self-Differentiation from Los Van Van
- 20 Los Van Van's Reinvention After Pupy Pedroso and Mayito Rivera's Departure
- 21 Not Missing Cuba's Musical Environment
- 22 The Inflexibility of Many Timba Musicians Living Abroad
- 23 Listening Intently When Accompanying Soloists
- 24 Conclusion

February 3, 2014

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- 02 Formative Years and the Importance of NG La Banda
- 03 Pianistic Gesture, Texture, Originality and Parallel Development in No Me Mires A Los Ojos

- 04 The Bass Line's Influence on the Expansion of the Octave Tumbao Texture
- 05 The Importance of Bass Lines and Coros in Nonliteral Repetition
- 06 Traditional Patterns in the Accompaniment of Mambos
- 07 The Importance of Reactive Spontaneity of the Piano During Percussion Gears
- 08 Tumbaos That Became Recognizable Hooks to the Cuban Public
- 09 Recognition and Admiration from International Salsa Musicians
- 10 Issac Delgado's Preference for the Discipline and Regularity in Puerto Rican and Nuyorican Salsa
- 11 Balancing One's Own Creativity with a Signature Sound
- 12 The Role of Tradition in Cuban Popular Music's Continuing Evolution
- 13 Anecdote About Not Joining Elio Revé's Charangón
- 14 Evaluation of Issac Delgado's Subsequent Pianists- Tumbaos As Unique Vestiges of Individual Creativity and Pianistic Style
- 15 Right and Left-Hand Hierarchies of Speaking and Filler Notes in Piano Tumbaos
- 16 Important Subtleties Regarding Filler Notes
- 17 The Importance of Knowing and Remaining Close to the Original Tumbao
- 18 Repeated Notes as a Marker of Stylistic Aggressivity in Timba
- 19 Funky Teclado
- 20 The Importance of Teclado in the Prototypical Timba Ensemble

July 26, 2016

- 01 Basic Skills and Stock Patterns in Latin Music Method Books
- 02 Cubaneó, Non-repetition, and Musical Evolution
- 03 Timba and Personal Restlessness
- 04 Cuban Classical Musicians' Disdain for Popular Music in General and Timba in Particular
- 05 Cuban Classical Musicians' Improvisation Envy of Popular Musicians
- 06 Classical Technique and Cuban Piano
- 07 NG La Banda's Concert Music, Early Timba's High Quality and Its Current Degradation
- 08 Speculations on Piano Tumbao Innovations During the 1990s
- 09 Issac Delgado's Calm, Refined Salsa as a Piano and Bass Tumbao Innovation Incubator

John Amira (September 18, 2012)

- 01 Introduction to Afro-Cuban Folkloric Drumming
- 02 Introduction to Cuban Batá
- 03 Julito Collazo
- 04 Los Marielitos
- 05 Surrogate Speech, Individual Innovation and the Batá Tradition
- 06 Haitian Digression
- 07 Teaching Approaches

Larry Harlow (April 8, 2013)

- 01 Introduction
 - 02 Early Cuban Influences
 - 03 Differences Between Cuban, Puerto Rican and New York Latin Musicians
 - 04 Honorary Latino Background
 - 05 Son and Típico Playing
 - 06 Arsenio Rodríguez and El Judío Maravilloso
 - 07 Ethnic Flack
 - 08 Tito Puente
 - 09 Band Format
 - 10 Electric Pianos
 - 11 Lino Frías and La Sonora Matancera
 - 12 Crafting Guajeos and Solos From Sheet Music
 - 13 Rubén González and the Buena Vista Social Club
 - 14 Rafael Ithier
 - 15 Lili Martínez
 - 16 Papo Luca
 - 17 Richie Ray's Left Hand
 - 18 Professor Joe Torres
 - 19 Sonny Bravo
 - 20 Charlie and Eddie Palmieri
 - 21 Cuba's Educational System
 - 22 Chucho Valdés
 - 23 Pupy Pedrosó and Los Van Van
- Lazarito Valdés- Stockholm, Sweden (March 29, 2018)
- 01 Early Formation and Tumbao Innovations
 - 02 Piano Technique, Feeling and Good Taste in Montuno
 - 03 Coloring with Teclado, Interacting with the Public and the Rhythm Section

Mario Allende (October 13, 2012)

- 01 Why Changuito
- 02 Drumming Workshop in Alberta, Canada (1994)
- 03 Changuito As Gatekeeper of Cuban Musical Truth
- 04 How Changuito Sees His Musical Role
- 05 Conga Technique Versus Talking on the Drum
- 06 Songo Innovations- Latter Van Van and Pupy
- 07 Changuito's Pedagogy, Rudiments, Folklore and Notation
- 08 Changuito's Drum Set Approach

Miguel Ángel de Armas (August 20, 2014)

- 01 Introduction

- 02 A Historical Overview of Cuban Popular Music Evolution
- 03 The Importance of Salsa as an Alternate International Stream, Popularity and Dance
- 04 Stable and Restless Piano Styles
- 05 The Influence of Changuí Tres and Flamenco Guitar on Piano Tumbaos
- 06 Rumba's Influence on Timba Tumbaos- Conversations and Syncopations
- 07 Son Montuno and Great Traditional Pianists
- 08 Son Montuno's Relevance to Cuba's Youth
- 09 Folklore's Relevance to Cuban Youth
- 10 Rumba Allows Everything
- 11 The Rigor of Cuba's Conservatories and the Power of Information
- 12 Quantity Versus Quality of Cuban Musicians On and Off the Island
- 13 The Ambitions and Aspirations of Cuba's Conservatory Graduates- Popular Music Versus Jazz
- 15 Touring Latin America
- 16 The Economics of Music in Socialist Cuba
- 17 Insufficient Promotion and Foreign Stereotypes of Traditional Cuban Music
- 18 Digression About Bachata
- 19 Distinguishing NG La Banda From Irakere
- 20 NG's Base
- 21 El Tosco's Jazz Flute Style
- 22 Balancing Street and School
- 23 The Cuban Public's Appreciation of NG
- 24 Dance Bands with Pejorative Connotations
- 25 Laughable Cuban Bands
- 26 Piano and Teclado
- 27 El Tosco Broke Up NG
- 28 El Trabuco and Latin Jazz
- 29 Arranging for el Trabuco

Rafael Ithier (August 11, 2014)

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Puerto Rican Versus Cuban Pianism- The Importance Of Individuality
- 03 Rafael Cortijo's Sound and El Gran Combo
- 04 Arranging for Cortijo and El Gran Combo
- 05 The Trombone in El Gran Combo
- 06 Bassists in Cortijo and El Gran Combo
- 07 Motivos As Hooks
- 08 Formative Cuban Influences and Individual Identity
- 09 Luisito Benjamín
- 10 César Concepción's Influence on Rafael Cortijo- Bomba and Plena de Salón
- 11 Orchestrating Bombas and Plenas with Rafael Cortijo
- Full

Rebecca Cline (July 7, 2014)

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Teaching Latin Jazz at Berklee
- 03 Studying Piano in Cuba with Chucho Valdés
- 04 Early Exposure and Formation in Puerto Rico
- 05 Filling In Musical Gaps
- 06 Defining Latin Jazz

Richard Ortega (August 19, 2013)

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Initial Impressions of Salsa
- 03 Timba in Sweden
- 04 Timba's Roots in Afro-Cuban Folklore and Popular Music Genres
- 05 Notation and Realization
- 06 Audition for Klímax and Piloto's Written Piano Tumbaos
- 07 Timba Arrangements, Tumbaos and Gears
- 08 Gear Origins
- 09 Melodic Marcha Tumbaos and la Charanga Habanera
- 10 The Importance of Musical Information and a Traditional Foundation
- 11 Differences Between Salsa and Timba
- 12 Cuban Performative Adaptations To Salsa and the Realization Of Notation
- 13 Piano and Bass Dissonances Between Traditional and Timba Tumbaos
- 14 Rigorous Training in Piano, Trumpet and Counterpoint in Cuba's Conservatories
- 15 Availability and Circulation of Traditional Music Recordings In Cuba
- 16 Cuba's Recording Industry and Azúcar Negra
- 17 The Harmonic, Contrapuntal and Timbral Roles of Piano and Keyboards in Timba
- 18 Suitability for Pianist or Keyboardist Roles
- 19 The Keyboard's indispensability in Timba
- 20 Keyboard Roles in Cuba's Top Timba Bands
- 21 Piano Accompaniment of Timba Cuerpos
- 22 Playing Keyboards with Cano Estremera
- 23 Responses to Timba's Critics
- 24 The Importance Of Cubans Valuing Their Own Music
- 25 Salsa Versus Timba Elements in Arrangements
- 26 The Lack of Soloing in Timba
- 27 Conclusion- Planning A Joint Project

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