

RCM SPARKS

Explore Latin Jazz and Latin Music



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Discover

Latin Jazz is a way of describing the influences of the music from several countries in jazz music: most prominently the music of Cuba and Brazil. Right from the start Jazz incorporated and blended European and African musical influences, and when these also came via Spain into South American countries or had a 'Spanish Tinge' in places like New Orleans, it added extra flavour to the music!



Explore

Rhythm

The most important Latin element is the rhythmic contribution to jazz. Most jazz uses a Swing feel, but Latin jazz has a 'straight' feel that fits with the rhythmic styles of Cuban and Brazilian music. Here is an example of a fundamental Cuban rhythm, the Clave. This word means 'key' in Spanish and it is the rhythm that locks together all the other rhythmic elements with Cuban music. Try this rhythm game, aiming to tap the beat with your foot like a drum, say the word 'chica' round and round like a shaker, and clapping the Clave:

The diagram illustrates the Clave rhythm across three staves over two measures. The first measure is marked with a repeat sign.

- Clave (clap):** The first staff shows a sequence of notes: a half note, a quarter note, a quarter rest, a half note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note.
- Subdivision (say):** The second staff shows a continuous eighth-note pattern. Below the notes, the syllables "chi - ca chi - ca chi - ca chi - ca (etc.)" are written.
- Pulse (tap foot):** The third staff shows a sequence of notes: a half note, a quarter rest, a half note, a quarter rest, a half note, and a quarter rest.

This is a tricky thing to do! Try doing it in groups with a few people assigned to each role. If you are feeling really confident you can do all three elements at once, making you into a 'human rhythm machine'!



Listen

Here are some key figures in Latin Jazz and Latin music for you to listen to. As you can hear from these tracks, just like Jazz, Latin music has spread widely, combining popular appeal with a strong connection to its cultural and music roots.

1. Chano Pozo

Chano Pozo was a Cuban percussionist who emigrated to the United States of America after the Second World War and collaborated with the jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie in some of the earliest examples of Afro-Cuban influenced jazz. He was also a devotee of the Santeria religion, which was developed by enslaved African people in Cuba to keep their religion alive away from home by disguising their deities as Catholic saints. You can hear Chano Pozo playing on tunes like Manteca and Algo Bueno in Dizzy Gillespie's Big Band. Chano played a Conga drum which became a staple instrument in the percussion section of Salsa bands.



Manteca: <https://youtu.be/s2Tt6W-TxXs>

Algo Bueno: <https://youtu.be/fUyE2lM4uG0>



2. Celia Cruz

Celia Cruz was a Cuban singer who left Cuba in the 1960s along with many Cuban musicians to build a career in the USA. She was a member of the Fania All Stars band which toured the world playing Salsa in the 1970s. Salsa is a dance music style that uses a lots of Cuban musical influences to combine singing, dancing and jazz soloing.

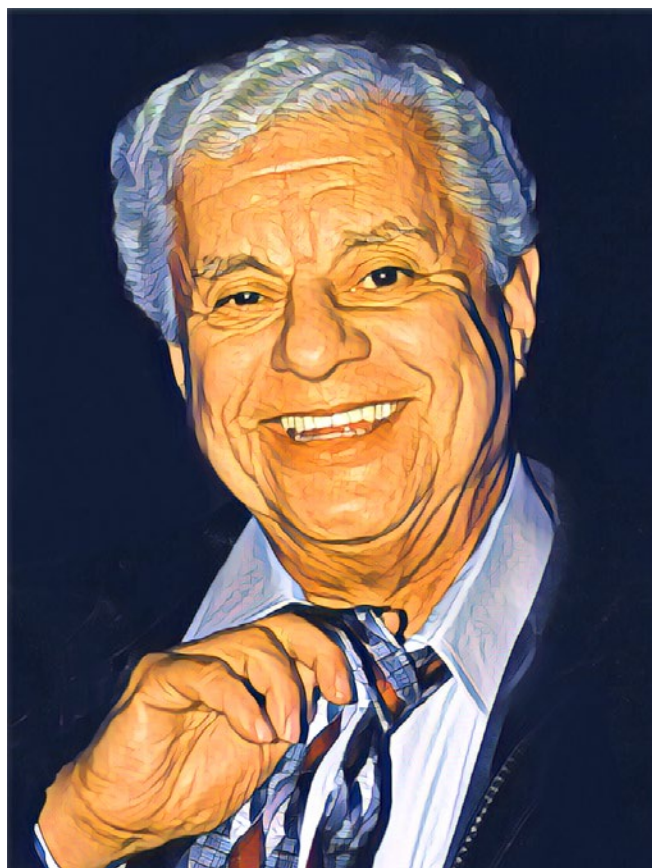
Guantanamera: <https://youtu.be/X2fdQcsBQ3o>

3. Tito Puente

Tito Puente was an American composer and percussionist of Puerto Rican descent. He brought many of the well known rhythms and styles of Latin music to the mainstream during his career. His most famous composition is Oye Como Va which has been widely covered by other artists.

Oye Como Va:

<https://youtu.be/zZQh4IL7unM>





4. Gloria Estefan

Gloria Estefan is a Cuban - American singer who brought the sounds of Latin music into the pop mainstream with her band Miami Sound Machine. Many Cubans emigrated to Miami during the 1960s and 70s and it has become a centre for Latin music since then.

Rhythm Is Gonna Get You:

<https://youtu.be/CZkjeJKB10M>



Discover

The Salsa Band

A Salsa band consists of three main sections:

1. Vocalists

- As well as singing the song vocalists will often play percussion instruments as part of the Rhythm Section (see below)
- Generally there will be a lead vocalist and others who sing backing or harmony parts
- Often the lead vocalist will improvise words and melody around the themes and ideas in the song, a bit like a combination of rapper and jazz soloist
 - Backing vocalists will sing repetitive 'riff'-like figures, often using the song title as a call-and-response figure behind the lead vocalist, much like a horn section



2. Rhythm Section

In traditional Son music (the antecedent of Cuban Salsa) the rhythm section mainly comprises:



- Acoustic Guitars (including the Cuban Tres)
- Acoustic Bass, played with the fingers as in jazz
- Percussion Instruments (see below)

The bass, guitar and percussion play interlocking patterns that work together to communicate the groove. The bass is centred around the roots of the chords and the guitars play patterns on top of this that fill out

the rest of the harmony. All of this creates the energy that makes the music ideal to dance to.

In Salsa, the rhythm section develops to include amplified instruments and normally comprises:

- Piano
- Electric or amplified acoustic bass
- Electric Guitar

Salsa grooves are more punchy and up-tempo than Son and a larger

horn section (see below) means the instruments need to be amplified to balance properly.



In Son and Salsa a variety of traditional Cuban percussion instruments are used including:



- Conga and Bongo drums (played with the hands)
- A Cowbell (known just as a Bell)
- Timbale Drums (played with sticks)
- Shakers

There are a wide variety of set patterns played depending on the style of the music (Bolero, Rumba, Cha Cha Cha, Timba, Mozambique, etc. Most are centred around the use of a clave (key) rhythm that binds everything together:



This is normally played on the Bell which is loud enough for everyone to hear!

3. Horn Section

In Jazz and related music the phrase 'horn section' refers to the trumpets, trombones and saxophones that are found in any band. The size and line-up can vary, from one of each instrument to even five saxes, four trumpets and four trombones as in a jazz big band. This is another development from Son, where there might be a single violin or trumpet played to accompany the singers and to take solos. As the music developed the arrangements for the horn section became more exciting and elaborate.



The horn section plays music that accompanies the singers, sits on top of the groove provided by the rhythm section and provides individual soloists too. Often the Mambo section of a Salsa piece will have interlocking riffs from the horn section that, combined with the groove in the rhythm section, adds real excitement and builds the intensity of the song which makes it great to dance to!



Watch the accompanying You Tube video guide and learn this song about Latin music.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ORFc_D4Vm0

THE KEY TO LIFE

Way down in old Havana, there's music all a-round
A joyful groove to make you move:
you can't escape the sound,
Of Mambo, Son and Salsa, Of Rumba, Chachacha.
And the clave will make you sway to the rhythm in the ground.

CHORUS

On the street, sing, be happy!
Feel the beat, that's the key to life!
Get off your seat! Make it snappy!
Move your feet, that's the key to life!

INSTRUMENTAL

REPEAT CHORUS

That's the key to life! That's the key to life!