

Salsa (jazz)

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A loosely defined term encompassing various musical styles of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Spanish Caribbean, and the developments of those styles as from the 1960s they incorporated elements of rhythm-and-blues, pop, and jazz and spread into a worldwide movement. While salsa emerged as a music of Puerto Ricans living in New York, its strongest musical root is the Cuban *son*. A comparable word had appeared as early as the 1930s in Cuban music (in the title of Septeto Nacional's recording *Echale salsa!*), and jazz had felt the influence of Cuban and Puerto Rican music from the 1940s (see Afro-Cuban jazz). However, the term salsa became common currency only in the 1960s, largely as a marketing handle for the Fania record label, which recorded many of the Afro-Caribbean musicians based in New York – notably Ray Barretto, Willie Colón, Celia Cruz, and Johnny Pacheco. The Latin soul and boogaloo dance crazes of the 1960 to 1970s, which absorbed components of rhythm-and-blues and pop, cemented the use of the expression; examples include Barretto's pop hit *El watusi*, from the album *Charanga moderna* (1962), and the title track of Cal Tjader's album *Soul Sauce* (1964, Verve 68614). By the mid-1970s it was used routinely in association with jazz contexts, though some of the musicians active in Afro-Cuban jazz objected to the term and felt that the commercialization of salsa had betrayed its authentic folk sources. Indeed, there is no clear point where Cuban music and salsa divide: cross-influence has been continuous from the 1930s. In this sense the key figures who developed and evolved Cuban musical styles throughout the twentieth century have a historical significance in the roots of salsa.

The rhythmic concept known as *clave* underpins all styles played in salsa. Sometimes the rhythm is overtly stated on the claves (as heard, for example, on *T.P.'s especial*, from Tito Puente's album *On Broadway* (1982, Conc. 207). More often it is not played but rather implied in the arrangement of every instrumental part in the ensemble; the rhythm of the tune and the accompanying figures, breaks, and solo improvisations are all phrased in order to blend with this implied rhythmic foundation. The *clave* rhythm takes a number of different forms depending on the context, all ultimately descended from various African styles. The two most common versions used in salsa are *son clave* and *rumba clave*. Both versions consist of a two-bar pattern with two accentuations in one bar and three in the other, the *rumba clave* being slightly more syncopated than the *son clave*; the rhythm may begin either with the bar with two accentuations (in which case it is referred to as “2-3” *clave*) or with the bar with three (“3-2” *clave*) (see ex.1).

Ex.1 The rhythmic patterns *son clave* and *rumba clave*



The musical notation for Ex.1 is presented in two staves. The top staff shows two patterns of *son clave*: the first is labeled "son clave 2:3" and the second is labeled "son clave 3:2". The bottom staff shows two patterns of *rumba clave*: the first is labeled "rumba clave 2:3" and the second is labeled "rumba clave 3:2". The notation uses quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests to represent the rhythmic patterns.

Ex.1 The rhythmic patterns son clave and rumba clave

An arrangement will be based on one of these *clave* rhythms. With rare exceptions, once the *clave* pattern is set in motion it continues in the same sequence throughout the piece. However, an arranger can create the effect of shifting the direction by making a section of the form last for an odd number of bars; in this way the two-bar *clave* sequence remains undisturbed, but the next part of the piece begins with the opposite phrasing, 2-3 becoming 3-2, or vice versa. *Son clave* forms the basis of most popular dance styles (e.g., *mambo*, *son montuno*, *guaracha*), while *rumba clave* usually underpins more folkloric and religious forms, such as *rumba*, *conga de comparsa*, and *mozambique*. The melody and brass breaks in Barretto's *Tu propio dolor*, from his album *Giant Force* (1980, Fania 579), exemplify the art of arranging in *clave*, and the listener clapping along in 2-3 or 3-2 *clave* should soon feel on which direction the track is based: one version will fit almost exactly, but the other will sound out of phase.

Salsa bands make use of a great variety of instruments, evolved from the various line-ups which traditionally performed the music's Afro-Caribbean antecedents. Thus a contemporary group might include violins and flutes, which are characteristic of the *charanga* orchestra; guitar and *tres* (a guitar with three courses of strings) from the typical *son sexteto*; brass and reeds from developments in Afro-Cuban jazz of the 1940s and 1950s; and a rhythm section, typically of piano, double bass, and a veritable arsenal of percussion, with conga, bongos, and timbales usually supplemented by cowbells, maracas, *güiro*, claves, and woodblock (some of these played by singers within the group). Bands which draw more on folkloric traditions might employ *sekere*, *cajón* (a Cuban drum made from a wooden box), and *batá* drum, and the incorporation of styles from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Colombia may call for the addition of the *tambora* (a double-headed drum) and *pandereta* (a frame drum fitted with jingles). Many of these instruments may be heard on the album *Concepts in Unity* (1975, Charly 153), by the Grupo Folklórico y Experimental Nuevayorquino.

A corresponding variety of formal structure is available to the arranger. There is evidence of the African roots of the music in the frequent use of call and response, both in the alternation of verses and choruses and in the common use of dialogues where a refrain (stated either by a chorus of vocalists or instrumentally) is interspersed with improvised statements from the lead singer (as on Cruz's *Cuando despiertes*, from the album *Fania All Stars with Celia Cruz*, SONY CDZ82352). This aspect of salsa form is referred to as the *montuno* or *coro*. Cruz's track illustrates another common element, also called a *montuno* (or, alternatively, a *guajeo*), whereby a repeated two- or four-bar phrase played by the piano functions as an accompanimental ostinato. This device has frequently been borrowed by jazz musicians, among them Chick Corea – on *Samba Song*, from his album *Friends* (1978, Pol. 6160) – and Luis Bonilla's Latin Jazz All Stars – on the title track of their album *Pasos gigantes* (1991, Can. 79507); for a portion of the tune on the latter, a modified version of John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*, a *montuno* appears within an ostinato that replaces the complex original chord progression.

Albums such as Irakere's *Irakere* (1978, Col. JC35655), *Machete* (1989-94, Xenophile 4029), by the percussionist John Santos, and *Moliendo Café (to Wisdom the Prize)* (1991, Sunnyside 1061), by Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band, exemplify an approach which mixes traditional Cuban dance and

folkloric styles with jazz to create a hybrid version of salsa. Michel Camilo, Paquito D’Rivera, and Monty Alexander are among the many others who have drawn on salsa styles in their recordings. Salsa bands may be seen playing in the video *Beats of the Heart: Salsa* (c mid-1980s).

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