

2005 Ohio Music Educators Association Convention  
**CLAVE Y GUAGUANCÓ: RHYTHM AND LIFE IN CUBA**

**Roger Braun**

Associate Professor, Director of Percussion Studies  
School of Music, Ohio University, Athens, OH 45701  
braunr@ohio.edu

*Cuba Facts*

Largest island in the Caribbean • Population 11.1 million  
Capital: La Habana (Havana) • Population 2.1 million

*Cuba History*

1492: Columbus explores the island • 1511: Spanish colonization begins • 1515: Havana founded • sugar and tobacco are primary crops, slaves imported for labor • 19<sup>th</sup> century: oppressive Spanish rule brings attempts for independence and gains US support • 1886: slavery abolished • 1898: US warship, *Maine* sunk in Havana harbor igniting Spanish American War • 1898-1902: US military occupies and rules Cuba • 1901: Cuban Republic formed, US dominant influence over Cuban politics and economy • Cuban military joins Allies during WWI and WWII • periods of political and economic instability lead to public revolt, political leaders abolish rights and assume dictatorial powers • 1956: Fidel Castro, previously exiled for revolutionary activities, invades and uses guerilla tactics against government • 1958: Castro's tactics gain popular support and he calls for a general revolt • 1959: President Batista resigns and flees country, Castro becomes premier, adopts communism • 1960: US institutes trade embargo after Cuba seizes US property in Cuba • 1961: US Bay of Pigs Invasion fails • 1962: Cuban missile crisis, US blocks delivery of Soviet weapons to Cuba • 1977: President Carter lifts US travel ban to Cuba • 1982: President Reagan reinstates travel ban with exemptions for government, journalists, researchers, and family of Cubans • 1991: Soviet Union dissolved, troops and economic support withdrawn from Cuba • mid 1990's: Cuban economic crisis, relations worsen with US but improve again in late 1990's • 2004: despite US legislative efforts to ease travel restrictions with Cuba, President Bush eliminates most travel, Castro responds by banning US dollars in Cuba

*Cuban Musical Styles*

*Early Forms: 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

**Rumba**—folkloric music and dance style. Three forms: guaguancó, yambú, and columbia. Rumba clave provides the rhythmic foundation. Strong West African influence. Percussion instruments used: claves, congas, shekeré, and palitos.

**Son**—popular style that combined Spanish peasant songs, guitar music, and African influenced percussion. Son clave provides the rhythmic foundation. Percussion instruments used: claves, guiro, maracas, and bongos.

**Danzón**—popular music and dance form that has roots in the French contradanza (brought to Cuba by Haitians who migrated to Cuba after the 1791 slave rebellion). Strong European influence. Percussion instruments used: timbales and guiro.

**Other traditions**— Sacred music traditions such as Santería that use batá drums; Conga, music for Cuban carnival comparsas (parades); musical styles from other parts of Latin America such as Puerto Rico (bomba and plena) and the Dominican Republic (merengue).

*Developments 1940-present*

The qualities found in rumba, son, and danzón combine creating new popular styles— influencing music throughout the Americas and becoming known around the world. American jazz and then rock music have a huge influence on these Cuban styles, especially before the Cuban revolution when exchange with the US was frequent.

**Specific styles include: son montuno, guajira, bolero, mambo, cha-cha, mozambique, songo**

During the 1970's the term **salsa** is coined to describe the “hot” music that included these Cuban styles and the new Cuban-influenced music being created around the world.

### **Cuban Instruments**

**Bombo:** Cuban bass drum. Typically emphasizes the 2<sup>nd</sup> note on the 3 side of clave (known as the bombo note).

**Bongos:** A pair of small high-pitched drums. Dominant drum of son music.

**Clave:** Pair of wooden sticks that play rhythm called clave. This rhythm serves as a foundation for the music, similar to bell patterns in West African music.

**Congas:** Called tumbadoras in Cuba. Barrel shaped drum with single head, evolved from West African drums. In a set of three drums each size has a specific name. **Quinto**– highest pitch and smallest drum (the solo drum in the folkloric rumba style). **Conga** / Segundo (Tres Dos or Tres Golpes in Rumba)– Middle size and middle pitched drum. **Tumba** / Tumbadora (Salidor in Rumba)– largest and lowest drum.

**Cowbell (Bell):** In Cuba the cowbells have specific names based on their size and role in the music. The most common bells are: bongo bell– large and somewhat flat, often picked up and played by bongo player. mambo bell– larger bell mounted on timbales. cha-cha bell– smaller bell mounted on timbales.

**Guiro:** Gourd with grooves cut into one side. Played by scraping a stick across the grooves.

**Maracas:** Pair of rattles, made from gourds, rawhide, wood, or plastic.

**Palitos:** Pair of sticks and the rhythm they play. The palitos traditionally played on a mounted piece of bamboo called the gua-gua; today a variety of wood sounds are used.

**Shekeré:** Large gourd covered with beads. Used in folkloric styles.

**Timbales:** Pair of metal drums mounted on a stand. Evolved from European timpani.

### **Recommended Resources: (Available through Descarga.com) Video / DVD**

- Bobby Sanabria, *Getting Started On Congas: 1. Conga Basics, 2. Fundamento 1 - Technique For One And Two Drums, 3. Fundamento 2 - Technique For Two And Three Drums* (1996: DCI) 3 separate videos.
- *Drum Solos Revisited, Hosted By Ralph Irizarry* (2004: Latin Percussion)

### **Books**

- John Amira and Steven Cornelius, *The Music Of Santería: Traditional Rhythms Of The Batá Drums: The Oru Del Igboodu* (1999 reissue: White Cliffs Media)
- Raúl Fernández, *Latin Jazz: The Perfect Combination / La Combinación Perfecta* (2002: Chronicle)
- Frank Malabe and Bob Weiner, *Afro-Cuban Rhythms for Drumset* (1990: Manhattan Music)
- Rebeca Mauleón, *Salsa Guidebook For Piano & Ensemble* (1993: Sher Music)
- Ed Uribe, *The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drum Set* (1996: Warner Bros.)

### **Music Scores**

Various, *The Latin Real Book* (1997: Sher Music)

### **CD Recordings**

- Jesús Alemañy's *¡Cubanismo! Featuring Alfredo Rodríguez* (1996: Hannibal/Rykodisc)
- Clave y Guaguancó, *Dejala En La Puntica* (1996: Egrem)
- Clave y Guaguancó, *Noche De La Rumba (1999: Tumi)*
- Issac Delgado Y Su Grupo, *La Formula* (2000: Ahi-Nama Records)
- Grupo Sierra Maestra, *Rumbero Soy* (2002: World Music Network)
- Hermanos Arango, *Oro Negro* (2001: Unicornio)
- Irakere, Featuring Chucho Valdés, *Yemayá* (1998: Blue Note)
- Lazaro Ros, *Orisha Aye: 13-CD Package Set: Shango, Oggun, Oshun, Yemaya, Obatala, Oya, Babalu Aye, Elewa, Osain, Argayu Sola, Korikoto, Oddua, Eggun* (2001: Unicornio) Also available separately.

### **CD Compilations**

- *Cuba: I Am Time* (1997: Blue Jackel) 4 CD set with 112-page booklet
- *The Rough Guide: Cuba* (1997: World Music Network)
- *La Rumba Soy Yo: El All Stars De La Rumba Cubana* (2001: BIS)

Also recommended, American bandleaders Ray Barretto, Eddie Palmieri, Tito Puente, Bobby Sanabria