

Developing an Understanding of Latin Music

Jose Antonio Diaz

The Latino population has grown at a tremendous rate. Latinos are making a great impact throughout our culture. Evidence of the Hispanic community influence in our country can be heard through the music development in our pop culture. The rise of music genres such as reggaeton provides confirmation that the direction of music is a reflection of our ever changing society.

The Latino community has many countries represented, each with its own music and interpretation. We have a wonderful opportunity to embrace this music development and incorporate it into our program. Many school districts are attempting to address this issue by developing Mariachi programs to address the needs of the Latino/Hispanic community. The problem is that they mistakenly assume that the Latino culture is only Mexican. Granted the Mexican community is the largest of the Latino population, but it is not the only one. Furthermore students of Mexican descent, many of them who do not speak Spanish, recognize that music such as Mariachi is an important aspect of their culture but it is not the music that they seek to enjoy.

As I begin teaching my twenty-second year at MacArthur High

School, I have witnessed how the musical taste of my students has changed throughout the years. Whether I personally like the changes in their music or not is not the issue. My students are listening to their “music” and I have to find a way to incorporate that sound into our band program, especially if I want to keep them involved in music. Once I have these students involved in the band program I am able to expose them to all kinds of great literature. Kids that were avid listeners of pop, hip hop, reggaeton, or heavy metal found themselves enjoying symphonic band literature.

I started Diaz Music Institute when I found that resources in the area of Afro-Latin music were not readily available in music education. Instead of complaining about the situation I gathered a group of my friends and developed Diaz Music Institute. The mission of Diaz Music Institute is to promote Afro-Latin music through performance and documentation. Afro-Latin is a very broad term used to describe the fusion of African rhythms

with the harmonic and melodic development of Latin America. Afro-Latin music is comprised of many rhythm such as son, cha-cha, rumba, bomba, meringue, samba, bossa nova, and reggaeton. Through the Diaz Music Institute many students in the Houston area

were introduced to various forms of Afro-Latin music.

I am often asked, “How do you teach these Latin rhythms?” Because I have been working with these Afro-Latin rhythms I have been able to incorporate them in various

performing groups ranging from the marching and symphonic bands to a jazz ensemble. The jazz ensemble is the best vehicle to work with students in the area of Afro-Latin rhythms. In recent years the amount of published charts in the area of Afro-Latin jazz, or Latin Jazz as it is more commonly called, has increased tremendously. Although there is great information on performance practices of Afro-Latin music, many compositions do not say specifically what Afro-Latin style or rhythm is needed.

Hear Jose Antonio Diaz at the TBA Convention/Clinic. He will present “Teaching the Jazz Concepts: Latin and Swing” with Richard Dunscomb on Sunday, July 23, 2:45 pm. He will also conduct his band Caliente in a Latin Jazz Concert on Sunday, July 23, 1:30 pm.

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The following is a brief suggestion that can be used to develop an understanding of cha-cha and mambo which are the most popular of the Afro-Latin rhythms used in jazz ensemble music.

The most popular of these rhythms used in Latin Jazz are cha-cha and mambo. In order to understand these Cuban developed rhythms, one must develop an understanding of clave. Clave is a two-bar rhythmic pattern that occurs in two forms: forward clave also known as 3-2 and reverse clave, also known 2-3. In 3-2 clave, or forward clave, the accents fall on the first beat, the “and” of the second beat, and the fourth beat of the first bar, and beats two and three of the second measure. In 2-3, or reverse clave, the pattern is inverted. There is also another clave called the rumba clave. In the rumba clave, the last note in the “3” bar of the rumba clave is delayed a half beat and played on the “and” of the fourth beat. Every component of Afro-Cuban rhythm—drum pattern, piano montuno, bass lines, melodic phrasing, and horn lines—has to be in sync with clave.

Examples of the various forms of Clave:

3-2 rumba clave (forward)



3-2 son clave (forward)



2-3 rumba clave (reverse)



2-3 son clave (reverse)



The Role Of The Drums

The drummer has the responsibility of translating the rhythmic figures originally played on various rhythm instruments (timbales, congas, and bass) onto the drum set. The instrumentation of the

rhythm section determines the approach used by the drummer. In the absence of a conga player, the drummer must replace that part with the tom-toms; if there are no timbales, the drummer should play the timbale part (cascara) on the shell of the floor tom, cymbals, or cowbell. Typically, the bass drum is used to reinforce the tumbao played on the bass.

Example of a basic drum-set pattern:



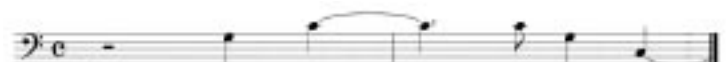
The Role Of The Bass

In the Latin Jazz medium the bass player does not “walk” (the traditional jazz 4-quarter-note-per-measure rhythm), but makes use of lines found in the more traditional types of Latin music. Here are examples of basic bass patterns for two different Latin grooves:

Example of a basic Son bass pattern:



Example of a basic Cha-Cha bass pattern:



Although the root and 5th are the predominant chord tones played by the bass, regardless of the style, this doesn't mean that other chord tones are not employed: in these examples we are simply pointing out the common usages.

As with most styles of jazz there should be a bond among the members of the band, especially between bass and drums. The bassist's main concern is to follow the drummer's bass drum pattern, as this is the pattern based on some of the rhythms being played on the other components of the drum set.

The Role Of The Piano

In traditional Afro-Cuban music, the pianist is responsible for establishing and maintaining the rhythmic pulse. One of the basic elements of this is

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the “montuno.” A montuno is a repeated, syncopated phrase, usually of 2 bars—although it can be extended to 4 or 8 bars, depending on the harmonic rhythm. While contributing to the harmony in Latin music, the montuno is also a very important figure of the rhythmic element.

In Latin jazz the two basic elements, montuno and “comping,” are integrated by most pianist to create a less rigid base from which to work. After all, comping must be flexible, because it is a process requiring the pianist to respond to a given melody or solo.

Example of a basic son montuno pattern:



Example of a basic Cha-Cha pattern:



The Role Of Horn Players

Horn players are not obliged to the Latin elements and proceeds more according to common jazz practice, especially with regard to harmonic and melodic matters and the extent to which these components are developed through improvisation. The underlying Latin rhythms however, can significantly influence the interpretation of the melodic line. The typical jazz swing feel has a strong 4 groove with secondary emphasis on beats 2 and 4. In contrast, Latin jazz grooves are more felt and written in 2 or cut-time meter. This “two feel” offers different possibilities for rhythmic superimposition than does the jazz groove. In the “Latin Jazz” medium,

horn players interpret eight notes as “straight” eights, as opposed to the swing eights typical in American jazz. This approach is used because straight (even) eight-notes do not emphasize upbeats.

Mixing The Latin Styles

Styles in Afro-Latin music are sometimes interchanged adding variety to the music. This creates a sort of tension and release within a given tune. For example, a composition may start as a Bolero for sixteen or thirty-two measures and change into Salsa or Samba. Styles are interchanged with discretion. Many mixes are made as intros, interludes, verse or body of a tune, or as an ending section within a piece. Four, eight or sometimes sixteen measures at a time are incorporated and usually done once or twice within a section to add some spice.

A few common groove mixes include:

1. Salsa with a quasi-Samba section and/or ending
2. Bolero with a quasi-Samba or Bossa Nova ending
3. Salsa with a Bomba section
4. Bolero that segues into Salsa
5. Salsa with a Guaguanco intro and/or interlude
6. Salsa with a Rap or Reggaeton section
7. Merengue with a Rap section

Conclusion

This article is very brief introduction to the style of “Latin Jazz.” In short, this genre began as a style of playing bebop lines over a Latin groove. This medium will continue to evolve and intensify as more artists probe deeper into the great wealth of Latin music. In order to develop a better understanding of “Latin Jazz,” as with any style, one must listen to recordings, watch live performances, and study the art form.

Jose Antonio Diaz is the Founder and Artistic Director for Diaz Music Institute. Currently, Diaz is in his twenty-second year as Director of the MacArthur High School bands in Houston, Texas. During his tenure, his groups have garnered many awards in local, regional, and national levels. Diaz success with the MacArthur High School Jazz Program was the subject of a featured cover story in Band Director's Guide Magazine. He received a Down Beat Magazine Award for Achievement in Jazz Education and was selected by FOX 26 and Univision Television stations as a Hispanic Hero. Recently, KPRC - NBC noted Diaz Music Institute as one of Houston's featured Hispanic Arts organizations.