

Basic Vocabulary

(Excerpted from the Salsa Guidebook for Piano and Ensemble, by Rebeca Mauleón, ©1993, Sher Music Co.).

* All terms with an asterisk appear in the Rhythm Section Appendix.

afro* - a rhythmic style combining adaptations of sacred *batá* drum rhythms, popularized in Cuba in the 1940's, and often used to interpret lullabies.

baqueteo* - the rhythmic pattern played by the timbales in the Cuban style known as *danzón*.

batá (drums) - the sacred, two-headed drums of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, also found in Cuba.

bolero* - a slow, lyrical ballad.

bomba* - a style of Afro-Puerto Rican music and dance which is also commonly found in salsa repertoires, typically played on *bomba* drums, which are similar to *conga* drums, although shorter and more barrel-shaped.

cáscara* - 1. the shell or sides of the *timbales*; 2. the pattern played on the shell or sides of the *timbales*.

cha-cha-chá* - a rhythmic style derived from the early Cuban *danzón*-mambo, created by violinist Enrique Jorrín (who named the style upon hearing the scraping sounds of dancers' feet). The cha-cha-chá eventually became a separate musical style from the *danzón*.

charanga - a specific style of instrumentation, consisting of rhythm section (contrabass, piano, *timbales*, and *güiro*), strings (from two to four violins, or any number of violins with a cello), and one wood flute. The *conga* drum was added in the 1940's. This term (and style of instrumentation) evolved from the *charanga francesa*, developed in the early 20th century.

clave (patterns)* - a five-note, bi-measure pattern which serves as the foundation for nearly all of the rhythmic styles in salsa music. The *clave* consists of a "strong" measure containing three notes (also called the *tresillo*), and a "weak" measure containing two notes, resulting in patterns beginning with either measure, referred to as "three-two" or "two-three". There are two types of *clave* patterns associated with popular (secular) music: *son clave* and *rumba clave*. Another type of *clave* - *6/8 clave* - originated in several styles of West African sacred music.

conga (rhythm)* - a style of Cuban carnival music typically played on acoustic percussion instruments and horns, in ensembles known as *comparsas*.

conjunto - a type of instrumentation which evolved and was defined around 1940, consisting of piano, bass, bongos, conga, *tres*, guitar, four trumpets and three singers (often playing minor percussion). The *conjunto* style has remained as the definitive sound for the "salsa" band, although there have been many combinations in instrumentation.

coro - "chorus".

coro/pregón - the call-and-response relationship between the lead vocal soloist, or *pregonero*, and the fixed choral response, or *coro*. In salsa song form, this takes place during the open vamp section called the *montuno*.

danzón* - a Cuban musical and dance form developed in the late 19th century, which is derived from the European Court and Country dances, as well as the *contradanza* and the *danza*. The instrumentation which generally interprets this style is known as the *charanga* orchestra, featuring strings and flute with a rhythm section. The *danzón* form consists of: an introduction called the *paseo* (A), the principal flute melody (B), a repeat of the introduction (A), and the violin trio (C). Innovations by several composers lead to the addition of a fourth section (D) called *nuevo ritmo*, later known as *mambo*. This section added elements of the Cuban *son*, and established an open vamp over which the flute, violin or piano would improvise.

descarga - "unloading" (lit.); a jam session, as well as an improvised tune.

guaguancó* - one of three styles of Cuban *rumba*, featuring a heightened polyrhythmic structure, and danced by male-female couples (in its traditional folkloric setting). The typical instrumentation (used by all styles) includes: *tumbadoras* (congas) or *cajones* (boxes), *palitos* (sticks) or *cucharas* (spoons), *claves*, and *marugas* (shakers). It may be simplified when interpreted by an ensemble.

guajeo - the repeated figure played by the string instruments in a particular ensemble, such as the *tres*' vamp in a *conjunto* instrumentation, or the violin vamp in a *charanga* instrumentation. Also used to refer to repeated horn lines, such as in a layered *mambo* section.

guajira* - an arpeggiated and floral song form, derived from the Cuban *son* and peasant music styles.

guaracha - traditionally a music and dance form from Cuba's comic opera, which developed into a form of street music, featuring satirical lyrics. Now generally associated with tunes of moderate tempo.

güira - a metal scraper used for Dominican *merengue*, scraped with a metal fork.

güiro (instrument) - a serrated gourd or calabash, scraped with a stick, which is extremely popular throughout Latin America. It has both African and indigenous American roots.

güiro (6/8 rhythm) - a rhythmic style, so-named because of its interpretation on the beaded gourds known (at first) as *güiros*, and later, *chékeres*. In addition to the *chékeres*, a bell and a tumbadora may be added.

mambo (rhythm) - 1. The section added to the *danzón* form (in the 1940's) which featured an open vamp and instrumental improvisation. 2. An up-tempo dance style, developed through the 40's and 50's, which blended several elements of North American instrumentation and harmony with elements of the Cuban *son*.

mambo (section) - the section of an arrangement which features new material, including layered horn lines called *moñas*.

merengue* - a rhythmic style from the Dominican Republic, which is a fast two-step, and is traditionally played on *tambora*, *güira* and accordion.

montuno (piano) - the repeated, syncopated vamp played by the piano in an ensemble.

montuno (section) - the open vamp section of a song, which features the *coro/pregón* (call-and-response singing) and instrumental solos.

moña - a horn line (either written or improvised), as well as a section featuring layered, contrapuntal horn lines. *Moñas* may occur during a mambo section, or during the *montuno* section, such as in a "shout" chorus underneath a soloist.

plena* - an Afro-Puerto Rican rhythm, traditionally played on *panderetas*, which is an important form of popular music. The *panderetas* resemble tambourines without the jingles.

pregón - the lead, improvised vocal which alternates with the fixed choral response, or *coro*.

rumba - a Cuban folkloric secular form, consisting of drumming, dancing and call-and-response singing which contains both African and Spanish roots. There are three styles of rumba: the *yambú*, *guaguancó* and *columbia*.

son* - a style of popular dance music of the peasant or working-class, combining several Spanish and African elements. The *son* began to take shape in the latter half of the 19th century in Cuba's Oriente province, and gave birth to several hybrids, including the *afro-son*, *guajira-son*, *son-pregón* and *son-montuno*. The *son* is perhaps the most important form at the root of today's popular salsa music.

songo* - a series of developing percussion patterns, blending several Cuban styles with elements of jazz and funk. Songo was initially created by Los Van Van bassist/director Juan Formell in the 1970's, together with original drummer Blas Egües, and was revolutionized by drummer José Luis Quintana "Changuito".

tumbao (bass) - the repeated pattern played by the bass, often accenting beats 2+ and 4. The pattern is a mixture of influences from the styles of the *contradanza* and the *son*.

tumbao (congas) - the repeated pattern played by the *tumbadoras* (conga drums) in the majority of the popular styles in Salsa, also referred to as *marcha* (march), emphasizing the fourth beat of the measure, as well as beat 4+.