

Create Your Own Afro-Latin Groove

The activities in this lesson will focus mainly on building a groove around the 2/3 son clave rhythm pattern and will explore the basic cascara rhythm and other rhythms that are commonly found in many styles of Afro-Latin music. Drawing on experience with pentatonic and blues scales from previous lessons, students will then improvise or compose their own Afro-Latin inspired groove.

Outcomes:

- As needed, students will listen to various recordings of Afro-Latin compositions and discuss similarities and differences (style, instrumentation, tempo, form).
- Students will explore and perform the basic cascara rhythm and other common Afro-Latin rhythms.
- Students will create an Afro-Latin rhythmic groove by performing the 2/3 son clave rhythm pattern along with the new rhythm patterns presented in this lesson.
- Students will add a simple bass line and chord progression to the rhythmic groove.
- Students will compose melodies or improvise over the Afro-Latin rhythmic groove using the major pentatonic, minor pentatonic, and blues scales.

Materials:

- Computer with a browser such as Chrome, Safari or Firefox, to access the Berklee PULSE website (create a PULSE account)
- Projector, PA system
- Percussion instruments, non-pitched and pitched (or preferred instrument)
- Variety of melodic instruments (preferred instrument)
 - Optional: One or a mix of the following - Manuscript paper, Notation software, a DAW

Assessment:

- Informal assessment – through class discussion and participation
- Formal assessment – through practice and performance of all rhythmic and melodic concepts presented in the lesson

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY IDEAS

Exposition of Material

1. Review the Son and Rumba Clave Patterns from the last lesson (The Clave).
 - a. This can be done using body percussion, various classroom percussion instruments, or instruments students have made.
 - b. Alone, in pairs, or small groups, students can practice the clave patterns along with a recording selected by the teacher, an audio file of the rhythmic patterns, or some other click, such as a metronome.
 - c. This lesson will specifically focus on the 2/3 son clave, as seen below. Listen to the 2 measure 2/3 son clave pattern along with the shaker pattern and bass drum pattern. Notice that the shaker is sounding on every quarter note in the measure and the bass drum is sounding on beats 1 and 3. The shaker and bass drum patterns provide a steady pulse, provide the downbeat of measure one, and offset the syncopation of the 2/3 son clave.

Identifying Key Concepts and Terms

Son Clave 2/3

The musical notation for the Son Clave 2/3 pattern consists of two measures. The first measure contains a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note. The second measure contains a quarter note, a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter rest, and a quarter note. Below the notation is a rhythmic grid with two rows. The top row contains the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 in the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 in the second measure, with plus signs between them. The bottom row contains blue circles on beats 2, 3, 1, and 4 of the first and second measures respectively.

Shaker

The musical notation for the Shaker pattern consists of two measures, each containing a quarter note on every beat. Below the notation is a rhythmic grid with two rows. The top row contains the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 in the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 in the second measure, with plus signs between them. The bottom row contains blue circles on every beat (1, 2, 3, 4) in both measures.

Bass Drum

The musical notation for the Bass Drum pattern consists of two measures. The first measure contains a quarter note, a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. The second measure contains a quarter note, a quarter rest, a quarter note, and a quarter rest. Below the notation is a rhythmic grid with two rows. The top row contains the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 in the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 in the second measure, with plus signs between them. The bottom row contains blue circles on beats 1 and 3 of both measures.

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
●				●				●				●			

d. In small groups, have the students practice the 2/3 son clave, shaker, and bass drum patterns. Students should rotate the patterns so they have the opportunity to practice each one.

The Cascara Rhythm Pattern

Each rhythmic pattern in Afro-Latin music can be thought of as part of a rhythmic jigsaw puzzle. The role of each pattern matters. The cascara rhythm pattern is very common in many styles of Afro-Latin music. Originally the cascara pattern was often referred to as the "shell" pattern because traditionally it was played on the shell (or rim) of the timbales, usually during soft sections of the song. Today, however, cascara refers more to the rhythm than the instrument it is played on.

2. Introduce the cascara pattern and have the students practice it until comfortable.

Basic Cascara Pattern

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
●		●		●	●		●	●		●	●		●		●

3. Once students master the cascara pattern, put students in groups. Have them begin practicing all the parts together (2/3 son clave, shaker, bass drum, and cascara). Have students switch parts so that they have the opportunity to play and feel the rhythm of each pattern within the whole. Use the following audio file as a reference:

4. Have students experiment with the following:

- a. Play the patterns at various tempos
- b. Play the patterns on different instruments
- c. Improvise other rhythmic patterns over the patterns

5. Introduce students to other common patterns. The following examples are referred to as “bell” patterns, because they are typically played on some type of metal bell, such as a cowbell or an agogo. They can also be played on other Latin percussion instruments or a drum kit.

- a. Have students listen to and practice each pattern alone, then with the 2/3 son clave, shaker, and bass drum patterns.

Other Common Patterns

Bell Pattern 1

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
	●	●		●	●		●	●		●	●		●		●

Bell Pattern 1 with 2/3 Son Clave, Shaker, and Bass Drum

Bell Pattern 2

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
●		●		●	●	●	●		●	●		●		●	●

Bell Pattern 2 with 2/3 Son Clave, Shaker, and Bass Drum

Bell Pattern 3

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●		●	●

Bell Pattern 3 with 2/3 Son Clave, Shaker, and Bass Drum

6. Have students practice and master all patterns, then practice them in various combinations.

a. Play the patterns at different tempos

b. Play the patterns on different instruments

c. Create a drum circle. Assign each student (or group of students) a pattern. Start the drum circle with just one pattern, then add rhythmic layers one at a time (every two bars, every four bars, etc.). Have students switch to a different pattern when given a cue. Listen to the following example that staggers the entrance of each pattern by two bars:

7. Once the students feel totally comfortable performing all of the rhythms simultaneously, introduce a simple bass. The following is an example of a bass line found in Afro-Latin music based on two chords, C7 and Bb7. This can be played as is on any melodic instrument, or altered to suit teacher or student needs.

Bass

C7

Bb7

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
●			●			●			●			●		●	

8. To complete the rhythm section, add an accompaniment using the same chord progression as the bass line. The following is an example of a simple piano pattern. Rhythmically this pattern is similar to the harmonic riff found in "Oye Como Va."

Piano/accompaniment

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff is labeled C^7 and the second staff is labeled Bb^7 . Both staves are in 4/4 time and feature a rhythmic pattern of chords. The pattern consists of a quarter note chord, a quarter rest, an eighth note chord, and an eighth rest. This pattern is repeated four times in each staff. The Bb^7 staff includes a flat symbol (b) before the first chord and a flat symbol (b) before the first chord of the second measure.

1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+
●		●			●		●				●		●		

9. The following audio examples add the bass line and the piano part to the layered percussion patterns from the previous example. The second example is at a faster tempo.

- a. Play the example for the students. Have students pick a rhythmic pattern and tap or clap along with the example. Switch rhythms and repeat as necessary.

Example 1

Example 2 – Faster Tempo

Activity/Assessment

10. Have students choose instruments and rhythmic parts they will play.

- a. Practice and perform as a group.
- b. Play at different tempos.
- c. Switch rhythmic parts.

C Major Pentatonic Scale

C minor Pentatonic Scale

C Blues Scale

12. Students can use the pentatonic and blues scales for improvisation or melodic composition. Each style of Afro-Latin music contains its own specific instruments and rhythms that make the music authentic, but for the purpose of this lesson students should try creating their own rhythmic and melodic patterns for improvisation, performance or composition.

- a. Students can create melodic patterns based on the rhythmic patterns presented in this lesson.
- b. Students can improvise freely.
- c. Students can create original compositions using notation or a DAW.

Lesson Closing

This introduction to common elements found in Afro-Latin music can be followed up by exploring any of the specific forms and styles derived from these elements (Salsa, Merengue, Mambo, etc.) or by exploring the influences this music has had on other styles of music, such as jazz, rock, pop, hip-hop, etc.