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1. INTRODUCTION

The timbales are a percussion instrument, whose history is closely connected to the history of Cuban music. Its ancestors, the European timpani, were brought to Cuba more than two hundred years ago.

Since I am studying at the Rotterdam conservatory, I have learned much about the timbales. I have practiced different playing techniques, transcribed many solos, listened to Cuban music and picked up much information about famous timbal players. But at the end of my studies I realized that I was lacking deeper knowledge about the history and the development of the timbales, which I consider my instrument of choice. In the process of writing my thesis I hope to gain knowledge to be able to retrace the historical path that the timbales have taken, since their ancestors were brought to Cuba. I also hope to achieve to understand, why timbales in Cuba are played the way they are, and which styles of music were involved in the development of the actual way of playing. This is why I came up with the following central question for my thesis:

“How did the timbales become an essential part in Cuban popular music?”

To structure my research in a way that it would effectively help me to answer my central question, I decided to break down the question into its three parts. ‘*Timbales*’, ‘*Cuban popular music*’ and ‘*Becoming an essential part*’. I chose these three topics to serve me as my main chapters and subdivided each chapter into several smaller sections. In the three main chapters I will present a short history of the timbales, an overview of Cuban styles of music and have a closer look at the Cuban way of playing timbales.

The information that I present in this thesis is collected from: hours of lessons; specialized books and the internet. Brought into a meaningful order, it will allow the reader to gain an insight view of the timbales history and its current role in Cuban popular music.

2. TIMBALES

2.1. DESCRIPTION

Timbales are two single headed drums made of steel (in some rare cases made of wood) of two different sizes. The two drums are mounted on a metal stand. The larger drum is called *hembra*, which is the Spanish term for female, and the smaller drum *macho*, which is the Spanish term for male. The naming of the drums refers to the two different sounds the drums produce when hit with a stick. One low and warm, representing the female part (*hembra*) and one higher and more aggressive, representing the male part (*macho*).

For a right handed player the timbales are set up with the low (bigger) drum on the left and the higher (smaller) one on the right, as on a piano (lowest note on the left and highest note on the right). This way of positioning the drums is similar to the way of how timpani are positioned in England, France and America and opposite to the way they are positioned in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

The person who plays the timbales is commonly known as the *timbalero* and plays the drums with a pair of wooden sticks. Today, timbales are commonly completed by a big and a small cowbell, a woodblock (made from plastic/synthetic material) and a cymbal that is mounted on an extra stand. Sometimes (depending on the musical style played) a snare and a bass drum is added.

Over the years the timbales have become “*one of the three elements of Cuba’s percussive holy trinity*” (Luis Tamargo: 2001). The combination of congas, bongos and timbales has made its way into almost all salsa bands Latin America’s and around the world.

In Cuba the timbales are known under many different names such as *pailas*, *pailas cubanas*, *pailitas*, *pailitas cubanas*, *timbaletas*, *panderetas* and *bongó*.

2.2. HISTORY OF THE TIMBALES

What today is known as Haiti, had been, till its independence in 1804, the colony of Saint Domingue. Under the leadership of France, colonist had brought the French *contredanse* to the islands colony. A musical style that had been a French adaption of the English country-dance during the 18th century and that was very popular under colonists.

With the Haitian revolution of 1791, many Haitians, of French as well as of African ancestry decided to migrate to Cuba in order to flee the rebellion.

The French/Haitian contredanse arrived in the nearby eastern province of Cuba (also known as *Oriente*) with the wave of migrants from Haiti. The Oriente region of Cuba, during the first years of the colonisation, had been a strategic centre for further expeditions towards the new world and it was an important harbour for trade with other Caribbean islands.

In Cuba, the French contredanse became the *contradanza criolla* and was soon adapted by Cuban musicians. The word *criolla* was dropped and the Cubanized version, called *contradanza*, was born. Spreading from the eastern part of Cuba over the whole island, the *contradanza* became a very popular style in Cuban music salons. It was the first musical style with an obvious African rhythm influence that was not banned from the music salons of that time, which until then had been reserved for European forms of music. The groups who would play the *contradanza* were called *orquesta típica*. These groups would include woodwinds, brass, strings, the Cuban scraper instrument called *guiro* and the *creole timpani*, a smaller version of the European timpani. From the 18th till the 19th century the *contradanza* underwent an evolution, during which it changed its name several times. It first would become the *danza*, then the *danza habanera* and then finally just the *habanera*. The *habanera* gained worldwide attention.

The *danzón* was the final step towards the introduction of the timbales. Miguel Failde Pérez created the *danzón* rhythm in 1877 and would perform his composition "Las Alturas de Simpson" for the first time in 1879 at a popular dancehall in Matanzas. "Las Alturas de Simpson" still holds the title to be the first *danzón* ever composed. The instrumentation of Failde's orchestra consisted of tuba, trombone, clarinet, a

cornet and two timpani. The danzón rapidly gained tremendous popularity and soon became Cuba's national dance.

During the late 19th and early 20th century a new kind of orchestra emerged. The pianist and composer Antonio Maria Romeu (1876-1955) had formed the first *charanga francesa* orchestra. Romeu was the first to include the piano in the already existing combination of flute, contrabass and violins. A few years after the creation of the *charanga francesa*, Romeu decided to replace the timpani with the smaller timbales. One of the reasons that the timpani had been replaced by the timbales, might have been the difference in size and weight. Too heavy and too big to be carried around for a long time and over long distances, the timpani had become unpractical. The timbales became the *charanga*-musicians instrument of choice.

At that time the *charanga* orchestras would still play without congas. As the lead percussion instrument, only accompanied by the guiro, the timbales had to play subtle parts along the violins, cello and flutes. But at the same time had to be played with intensity to be able to lead the whole orchestra. Orestes Vilato (famous *timbalero*) described it like that: "*It was acoustic music, where you'd play as light as a fly and as heavy as an elephant.*"

Since their first appearance in Cuban music, the timbales have made their way into many styles of Latin American popular music.

2.3. DEVELOPMENT

The Cuban style timpani, also called *pailas cubanas*, were made from iron or copper vessels, that were originally used in sugarcane factories to hold the juice of the cane. The Cuban version was cheaper to build than European timpani and due to economic problems this was an important factor. Though smaller than their European counterpart, many groups (due to portability reasons) only used one timpani standing on a tripod. This meant that the *pailero* (timpani player) needed great skills to get all the sounds necessary for all the musical genres out of one drum.

Still bigger and heavier than modern day timbales, the *pailas cubanas* were not perfectly suited for groups that had to do a lot of traveling. The next step in the evolution of the timbales were the so called *timbalitos*. Resembling the *pailas cubanas*, but much smaller in size, these instruments were made from wooden

barrels cut in half with a goat skin nailed to one side. The barrels had originally been used to hold olives which were shipped in from Andalucía. Two timbalitos, one bigger and one smaller, could now be mounted on one tripod and easily be played while seated.

When and how the timbalitos have made their transition from a wooden instrument to an instrument manufactured from steel is not documented. The contact to North American jazz bands, which, at that time, were playing in many night clubs in Havana, might have played a role. The influence of the drumset and especially the sound and design of the snare drum could have influenced Cuban musicians, so that they changed their design of the timbalitos towards metal instead of wood.

The last transition from wood to metal has been the final step in the evolution of the timbales as we know and play them today. And since then the timbales basic concept of two metal kettles, each covered with a single skin, mounted on a stand, hasn't changed much, if at all.

One interesting step towards today's timbales setting is the adding of the cowbell. In the 1930s Israel 'Cachao' López and his brother Orestes López were playing in the Orquesta Maravilla de Arcaño, when a new part called *mambo* or *montuno* was introduced to the danzón. This new part made use of a small cowbell, which then became a part of the timbales setup.

Another important part of the timbales is the shell, or *cáscara*. Today's timbales makers are mainly using two different ways of shaping the shell of the kettle. One way is to leave the shell with a completely flat surface. Another way is to craft the shell with one or two little creases/wrinkles, in order to improve or change the sound of the *cáscara*, that is produced when it is hit with a stick.

A constant changing factor was the quality of the material as well as the quality of fabrication. The skin, which is used to cover each drum, is not anymore made from animal skin but made from synthetics. And the hardware, on which the timbales are mounted, is much more solid and stable then in the first half of the 20th century.

Today there is a wide range of different sized timbales available. The size of timbales varies from very small (6 inch and 8 inch) to quite big (15 inch and 16 inch) and are used in various musical styles. The most common size of a pair of timbales, today used in salsa music, are pairs of 13 and 14 inch or 14 and 15 inch drums.

2.4. USE NOWADAYS

Salsa is not the only genre in which timbales are used. With their distinctive sound, timbales are used in many reggae bands and even western pop music often makes use of timbales, as an effect.

The setup of timbales and drum set developed in the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, when Cuban bands, influenced by North American jazz, started to combine the sound of percussion instruments with the sound of the drum set.

Later on, the creation of *songo* (a rhythm created in the late 1960s) made the drum set become a permanent part of modern Cuban popular music. But it was in the early 1990s with the appearance of a musical genre called *timba*, that more and more drummers (playing Cuban popular music) added the timbales to their drum set. The combination of drum set and timbales gained much popularity during that period, and it is today considered a standard setup for drummers playing Cuban popular music.

Timbales are also being used in situations where one person has to play more than one percussion instrument at the same time. A basic setup for one percussion player could be a pair of congas and a pair of timbales. The percussionist then would play the congas with one hand and play the timbales with the other hand. Sometimes foot pedals are added to this setup, enabling the percussionist to imitate complete percussion sections.

Setup playing has become very common in today's percussion scene (partly out of the need to keep groups as small as possible). A person who has to be mentioned when talking about setup playing is Cuban percussionist *Roberto Vizcaino*. He is a pioneer and innovator in the field of setup playing. An early example of his playing can be listened to on the Gonzalo Rubalcaba recording "Live in Havana" from 1986.

2.5. IMPORTANT TIMBALEROS / PERCUSSIONISTS

In this chapter I present a short list of Cuban timbaleros that, in my opinion, have been very influential in the history of timbales playing.

Ulpiano Díaz (Arcaño and Fajardo) - timbalero in groups of the charanga format and a great pioneer in the use of the cowbell with the timbales.

Walfredo De Los Reyes - famous percussionist and innovator in adding the timbales to his drum set.

Guillermo Barreto - his playing on the famous descarga sessions with Cachao made him become a legend to all generations of timbaleros to come. He also was one of the first to add the timbales to a drum set.

Blas Egües - trap drummer who, together with Juan Formell, is the true inventor/creator of the first songo pattern, which afterwards got picked up by “Changuito”, for further development.

Amadito Valdés - student of Walfredo De Los Reyes. Known for his precise solos and fine technique. He became to more international recognition after the collaboration with Juan de Marcos González and his Afro Cuban All-stars, which was documented in the film “Buena Vista Social Club” (by Wim Wenders).

Filiberto Sánchez - timbalero with Benny Moré and Orquesta Riverside in the late 1950s. After the “Buena Vista”-boom, timbalero with Ibrahim Ferrer’s big band.

José “Changuito” Quitana - one of the creators of songo and innovative timbalero. One of the best known Cuban timbaleros/percussionists of our time.

Daniel Díaz - timbalero with *Orquesta Ritmo Oriental*. He played a unique set of timbales, consisting of timbales, several toms and bells.

Emilio del Monte - timbalero with Jesús Alemañy’s “Cubanismo”.

Elio Revé Sr. - timbalero and famous band leader who in the 1950s formed the group “Orquesta Revé”, that mixed charanga with changüí. Revé and his group became an important factor in the development of Cuban music and his style of playing the timbales is very distinctive.

Calixto Oviedo - trap drummer and timbalero. In the late 1980s Calixto became the first drummer of Arturo Sandovals group after leaving Irakere. He was a founding member of *Adalberto y su son* (1983) and played drums with *N.G la banda* from 1991 till 1996. He lives in Sweden since 1997. Calixto has performed with the who is who in salsa and latin jazz.

3. CUBAN POPULAR MUSIC

3.1. CUBA, THE ISLAND

Its 110.860 km² are making Cuba the biggest island in the Caribbean. It is located about 145 miles south of the North American coast of Florida. Cuba is part of a group of islands called the *Greater Antilles* which includes Jamaica, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. The *Republic of Cuba* consists of the island of Cuba and the *Isla de la Juventud*, as well as of several archipelagos. In July 2009, the population was estimated at 11.451.652 (Central Intelligence Agency).

3.2. HISTORY

Before Cuba was discovered in 1492 and colonized by Spanish conquistadores, it was inhabited by native Americans known as the *Ciboney*. The Ciboney were hunter-gatherers and, historians have calculated, immigrated to Cuba from South America. Within one century after the arrival of the Spanish, almost all natives had disappeared.

Below, I have presented a list of events of the last 100 years. The list is not detailed and only meant to provide basic information about Cuba's history.

- 1492: *Cristóbal Colón* (Christopher Columbus) arrives on Cuba and claims the island for Spain.
- 1513: year in which the first slaves are brought to Cuba. Amador de Lares, a landowner, is permitted to bring four slaves from Hispaniola.
- 1514: Establishment of *Havana*.
- 1520: Arrival of the first large group of slaves (300).
- 1557: From the originally 2 million natives that populated Cuba before the arrival of the Spanish, only 2.000 are left (estimated number).
- 1607: Havana is given the title of capital of Cuba.

- 1762 - 1838: 391.000 slaves (estimated number) are brought to Cuba. They can be divided into four groups: the first and biggest group are the Kongo/Bantu, second largest group are the Lucumi from Nigeria, the third group are the Carabali (known as Abakua) also from Nigeria and the fourth group are the Arara people from Benin. There are several other smaller ethnic groups brought to Cuba, but their traditions did not survive.
- February the 15th 1898: After a long lasting struggle for independence the U.S. sends the *USS Maine*, an American battleship, which explodes in Havana's harbor. The U.S. blames Spain and declares war.
- December the 10th 1898: Spain and the U.S. sign the *Treaty of Paris* after which the U.S. takes over control of Cuba as well as of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam.
- January the 1st 1899: The U.S. refuses Cuba its own independence and installs a provisional military government.
- 1902: The year in which the Cuban flag is waving over Havana for the first time. On May the 20th *Tomás Estrada Palma* is taking the oath to become president of Cuba. In the following years all Cuban presidents are under the influence of the U.S. and Cuba experiences several rebel uprisings with the intend to overthrow the government which consequences in the U.S. intervening.
- 1933 until 1940: Cuba's communist party gains influence and starts to support Fulgencio Batista who, after free elections in 1940, becomes president.
- 1952: After realizing that he would not be reelected in the presidential elections Batista organizes a coup and stays president. During his second presidency Batista was accused to have close relations with the Mafia. He became increasingly unpopular and was described as a dictator.
- December 2nd 1956: Led by Fidel Castro, a small group of rebels land in Cuba. The rebellion begins.
- 1958: The rebellion is successful. After the rebels capture Santa Clara, Batista flees the country to find exile in Portugal.
- February of 1959: Fidel Castro becomes prime minister of Cuba.
- 1963: Cuba is under a commercial embargo laid on by the U.S..
- 1981: Ronald Reagan becomes President of the U.S. and announces a tightening of the embargo.

- 1990: The fall of the Soviet Union results in an ending of all economic subsidies that Cuba received from the Soviet Union. This has a fatal economic effect for Cuba and is the beginning of the so called “Período Especial” (special period) during which most Cuban people suffer a shortage of food.
- 1991: All Soviet troops leave Cuba.
- 1990s: Through out the 1990’s Cuba experiences economic repressions from the U.S. and terrorist attacks on hotels and discotheques located in Havana. The attacks are said to be sponsored by the CANF (Cuban American National Foundation) which openly supports the attacks in an advertisement in a Miami based newspaper (El Nuevo Herald).
- 1998: The Pope John Paul visits Cuba in February. In May - June several European countries call for an end to the U.S. embargo.
- 2002: Ex U.S. president Jimmy Carter visits Cuba and speaks on national television. The U.S. ends the travel ban and U.S. citizen are allowed to visit Cuba.
- 2007: The United Nations Human Rights Council removes Cuba from the list of nations believed to be violators of human rights.
- February 2008: Raúl Castro, brother of Fidel Castro, is elected to be the new president of Cuba.

3.3. POPULAR MUSIC IN LATIN AMERICA

The meeting of European and African music, brought into Latin America by colonists and African slaves (in some cases also influenced by Native American music), has created very different musical styles all over South and Central America. In most countries of Latin America these musical styles and rhythms have greatly influenced popular music.

In Brazil the combination of African and European culture led to a variety of internationally known styles like *choro*, *samba*, *bossanova* etc., plus a vast number of specialized local styles and rhythms.

Argentina's best known example is the *tango* (tan-go; named after drums of African salves).

As the birthplace of the cajon, Peru created styles like *lando*, *festejo* and *marinera*, as well as native Peruvian influenced styles like the *huayano*.

Famous musical styles of Colombia are the *cumbia* and the *vallenato*, from the Atlantic coast and the *currolao* from the Pacific coast.

Venezuela's perhaps most typical and famous musical styles are the *joropo* and the *gaita*.

A style of music that is very popular in several countries of South American is *salsa*. The word salsa literally means *sauce* and is used to describe a genre that is a mixture of several Afro Caribbean and Afro Latin rhythms that all have their origin in different parts of Latin America. Today salsa and salsa derived genres are omnipresent in most countries of Latin-America. Exceptions are Argentina and Brazil, which have their very own, traditionally rooted, popular music genres and salsa is not listened to in a big scale.

In Latin America and especially in the Caribbean, there have been many discussions about who contributed most to the creation of Salsa and its further development. Puerto Ricans and Cubans alike, claim to be the true inventors, while Colombians have given Cali the title "Capital of Salsa" and crowned themselves kings. Salsa music has become a part of the identity of many Latin-American people and for some even a prestigious trophy that has to be claimed your own.

Also North American and European music has become very popular in countries of Latin America. The constant progressing globalization and the internet, making it possible to listen to music from any given country at any given time everywhere around the globe.

3.4. POPULAR MUSIC IN CUBA

3.4.1. THE AFRICAN INFLUENCE

Like the music of many countries in Latin America, Cuban music is deeply influenced by African and European traditions alike. Since 1792, free and enslaved Afro-Haitians and African slaves have brought their traditions and music to Cuba, which offered them a place where it was possible to practice their religion, including religious music (sometimes secretly, but also openly). The influence that these slaves had on the existing European music traditions, was of prime importance for the development of almost all traditional Cuban rhythms and styles of music.

The fact that, unlike in other western colonies, slaves in Cuba were able to keep their religions alive, by renaming their gods with the names of Christian saints, kept the church under the believe that thy had converted and were practicing the teachings of Christianity, while in reality praying to their own African gods. This is one reason for the survival of the very active African traditions as well as many African influenced music and percussion instruments (like the *batá* and the *conga*) in Cuba.

The first obvious African influence to western ballroom music in Cuba was the *cinquillo*. The *cinquillo* is a rhythmic one bar pattern brought to Cuba from *Hispaniola* (today known as Haiti) around the beginning of the 18th century. It played an important role in the development of the *danzón* and one can clearly recognize it while listening to the *baqueteo*, a rhythmic five note pattern played by the *timbales*.

Next to the *baqueteo* is the *clave*, also an African-derived rhythm. The *clave* is a two bar long rhythmic pattern which is a fundamental part of most Cuban music. There are two different *claves*. The *son clave* and the *rumba clave*. Due to their two bar structure, both *claves* can be played starting with either the first bar or the second bar. This is why some people talk about the existence of four different *claves* instead of two. The *clave* originates from an African 6/8 *clave* that (in Cuba) transformed into the two *claves* we know today.

The *clave* has made its way into many styles and is considered the organizing element of Cuban music. Every instrument's pattern, or part of a musical arrangement stands in relationship to the *clave* and its direction. And every

instrumentalist always has to know how his instrument relates to the clave in a specific song situation.

3.4.2. THE DEVELOPMENT FROM 1959 TILL TODAY

Over the decades there have been many musical trends in Cuba. In this chapter I will focus on the time from 1959 till today and describe the evolutionary steps that Cuban music has been gone through, during this period of time.

In the years after the revolution, Cuba's tourism industry decreased so much, that it soon was virtually not existent anymore. For most theaters, venues and night clubs this meant the end. Musicians lost their jobs and many without work left the country to go to the US or other Latin American countries.

The music didn't change much in these years. Styles like *filin* and *pachanga*, that had established themselves before the revolution, were still very popular with the Cuban audience. *Filin* (feeling) was the Cuban answer to the music of Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday. And singers like Elena Burke and Omara Portuondo became successful not just in Cuba. *Pachanga* was a very popular style of dance music that was played by charanga orquestas. The immense popularity of the *pachanga* in the early 1960s lead 'Che' Guevara to the statement "*socialismo con pachanga*" (socialism with *pachanga*).

During the mid-1960s Cuba's political leadership started to give signals of change by intervening into the music scene. Theaters, venues and music clubs were now under the management of State led organizations. In order to accentuate the Cuban identity and differentiate Cuban music from US music, the state controlled media started to support original Cuban rhythms, called *nuevos ritmos* (new rhythms), like *pa'ca*, *pilón* and *mozambique*. It was during the same time that the Cuban government introduced a new music education system based on the Soviet Union model of music education. This system had the purpose to promote classical music and culture to the masses. From that time on, also black Cubans had the chance to get a high quality music education. This renewal of music education led to a great improvement of the technical level of Cuban musicians throughout the whole island. In fact, since then,

no other country than Cuba has produced an equal volume musicians with excellent musical qualities, compared to the population percentage.

The fact that the majority of Cuba's population was black had made the Afro-Cuban identity an important factor of the revolution. This was reflected in the support of black folklore from the 1960s on. An example was the State initiated creation of the *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional* in 1962.

The second half of the 1960s were characterized by the dominance of Anglo-American pop and rock music, which also caught the attention of Cuba's youth. The government tried everything to prevent the rise of foreign music in Cuba and one more time increased the media presence of mozambique and other 'truly' Cuban styles of music. In an interview with Juan Formell, the band leader described the situation as followed "..., and by decree broadcast that guy Pedro Arrogan [sic] every half an hour... people eventually hated Gueiro [Izquierdo] so much that they never wanted to dance again." (Vincenzo Perna, 2005).

In the eyes of the Cuban leadership, popular dance music became an enemy of the socialistic system. The news of anti-establishment youth subcultures in Europe and the US, led to the shutting down of all Havana's music clubs and dance venues by the government. It was an attempt to prevent these subcultures to establish themselves in Cuba.

Because of the missing interest of the Cuban youth in local music, the government finally forbade any kind of Anglo-American music on television and radio in 1973. It announced that everybody who listened to those music genres would support the political and economical sabotage of Cuba. These ban was lifted four years later and Cuban radio stations started to play the same program that could be heard on US stations around the clock. Though Cuban popular music was at its low point, the 1970s represented a period of change. The emergence of bands like Los Van Van and Irakere during the early 1970s marked the turning point of Cuban popular music.

Los Van Van was founded by Juan Formell (bass player and composer) in 1969. The band adopted elements of the charanga but instead of playing with acoustic instruments, used electric violins, electric bass, guitar, keyboard and the drum set. Successfully incorporating the influence of Western rock and pop, and mixing it with

son, Los Van Van soon gained great success among Cuban listeners. This specific mix, soon called *songo*, became the groups trademark. Songo and the introduction of the drum set to Cuban music was the beginning of a new era of Cuban music. The aspects of rumba, son and funk, made songo an electrifying mix that not many dancers could resist.

Another important group in the history of Cuban popular music was Irakere. Irakere was founded in 1973 by pianist Jesús 'Chucho' Valdés and other members of the group *Orquesta Cubana de Música Moderna*. Still existing today, Irakere has been Cuba's most famous jazz band for almost four decades. In the first years, the group had to fight for survival, because the responsible ministry of culture didn't accept the group's wish to play jazz influenced music, which at that time was seen closely related to the capitalistic US regime. But over the years the group could establish their fusion of jazz, rock, Afro Cuban popular and folkloric elements, and was even able to tour outside of Cuba. The use of Afro-Cuban rhythms and percussion instruments like the batá and the *chekeré* became one of the groups trademarks. Like Los Van Van, also Irakere also incorporated the drumset into their rhythms section and so paved the way for the use of the drum set for future groups of young Cuban musicians.

A key point in Cuban music history of the 1970s was the introduction of electric instruments and incorporation of rumba into Cuban popular dance music. The creation of songo must be pointed out as the most important stylistic result of that period.

"In 1980, a Cuban survey revealed that about 80 percent of 15 to 17-year-old students preferred 'contemporary international music', while only 13 percent of them favoured 'contemporary national music'." (Alén Perez 1988). Around the same time Cuban musicians who toured Latin America, brought back many records of Cuban influenced music that was played in Colombia, Peru, Venezuela and other South American countries. They realized that Cuban music seemed to be more alive in other countries than in its actual birthplace.

The final turning point, which made the Cuban youth rediscover Cuban music for themselves, was the concert of Venezuelan singer and bass player Oscar de León in Havana in 1983. What had been Cuban music from the time before the revolution, finally returned to Cuba in form of *salsa* and gained great popularity. Cuban

musicians would start incorporating aspects of it (like the use of trombones) into their music and the Cuban public reacted enthusiastically. The Cuban government changed its position towards popular dance music (which always had been rejected) and towards the end of the 1980s eventually started to promote it as a national style of music, called *salsa cubana*. This trend resulted in the reopening of some of Havana's dance halls and clubs.

In the 1990s Cuba re-introduced tourism as a step against the período especial (period of economic crisis that began in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union) and Cuban popular music became an economically interesting business for the country. The 1990s was the time of birth for a new style of Cuban music called *timba*. One of the key figures of timba was José Luís Cortés ('El Tosco'). "...in Cuba El Tosco is today widely credited as the inventor of timba." (Vincenzo Perna: 2005). Cortés had been a member of Los Van Van from 1970 till 1980 and afterwards a member of Irakere from 1980 till 1988. The experience of being a member of the two most influential groups of the 1970s must have played a great role in Cortés future development. After leaving Irakere, Cortés founded the group NG La Banda. A group of young virtuous musicians that were about to change Cuban music forever. NG La Banda was mixing jazz, funk, salsa and rumba, with lyrics that would mirror and connect to the life in the black barrios of Havana. The band soon gained great popularity amongst young Afro Cubans.

The fact that tourism was re-introduced and the occurrence of a sudden chance to make money as musicians, playing *musica bailable* (dance music), made the genre boom like never before. Within a short time there were dozens of timba groups fighting for lucrative jobs in hotels and other places that attracted tourists. In the time between 1993 and 1997 timba was the number one style of music listened to in Cuba. A typical timba song would start of with a short salsa-like theme that would soon go over into a long montuno section with different coros and mambos. The lyrics of the songs were often banal and would deal with situations of Cuban daily life. Bands that played timba music could almost be seen as institutions with often changing members. The image of a musician who played timba was an image of success. Especially the leaders, if not to say owners, of groups like La Charanga Habanera, Manolín, Issac Delgado and Paulito FG were living a flashy lifestyle and were able to afford all sorts of consumer goods.

At the beginning of the new millennium the Buena Vista had international success with traditional styles of Cuban music. Suddenly many old musicians like Ibrahim Ferrer, Omara Portuondo and Ruben Gonzáles were the best payed musicians on the island. Many Cuban musicians tried to jump on the hype in order to make some extra money.

Another trend that can be seen is the revival of Cuban Jazz. Groups like Maraca y Otra Visión and Jesús Alemañys Cubanismo have successfully mixed traditional Cuban styles with Jazz. With more and more access to North American music, Cuban Rap gained tremendous success with young Cubans. And like it is usual for Cuban musicians, it very soon was mixed with all kinds of styles of Cuban music and can be heard in countless combinations.

In 2004, Reggaeton (a mix of Jamaican Reggae/Dancehall and Latin rhythms) flooded all parts of Latin America - including Cuba. The simple rhythmic structure made it easy to mix it with all kinds of local rhythms like the Puerto Rican bomba, and plena, and the Dominican merengue. There are uncountable style mixes with Reggaeton and the style could sustain its popularity till today.

In summary, the decades of Global isolation, the mix of a good music education system, the current and very present African culture with its many sacred and non-sacred rhythms, have led to a unique music scene and musical identity, which is autonomously known as "Cuban music".

I am sure that the will to experiment and the great creativity of Cuban musicians will keep Cuban music alive for a long time.

4. BECOMING AN ESSENTIAL PART

4.1. THE PERCUSSIVE TRIO

4.1.1. CONGA, BONGO AND TIMBALES

The three percussion instruments, conga, bongo and timbales are a fixed component of modern Latin American and Caribbean dance music. But they don't share the exact same background and are all derived from different styles of music.

The conga, or *tumbadora*, is a wooden hand drum in form of a barrel. It is derived from the *makuta* drums, which were brought to Cuba by Congolese slaves. The conga was first used in carnival groups (*comparsas*), and became an essential part in Cuban *rumba* and popular music. Its introduction to popular music was not until the 1940s by Arsenio Rodriguez (famous Cuban band leader and tres player). Arsenio Rodriguez was the leader of a group in the *conjunto* format. Conjuntos (derived from the *septeto* ensemble) appeared in Cuba around 1940 and consisted of vocals, guitar, tres, contrabass, two or three trumpets and bongos. A few years later Rodriguez added congas to his group and hence introduced the conga to Cuban popular music.

Like the conga, the bongo is an African influenced percussion instrument. It was developed in Cuba's Oriente province and played an important role in Cuban *son* (a style that derived from the *changüí*).

The historical background of the timbales has been discussed in a more detailed manner in the earlier chapter '*History of the timbales*'.

One can say that the unique fusion of the instruments: conga, bongo and timbales demonstrates the connection of African and European influences in the world of Caribbean and Latin American percussion. The conga and the bongo represent the African element and the timbales representing the European element.

4.1.2. THE ROLES OF THE INSTRUMENTS

A standard rhythm section of a group that plays modern dance music like salsa, commonly consists of piano, bass, congas, bongos and timbales (in a charanga orchestra the strings would be part of the rhythms section as well, and a band that plays timba, normally doesn't play without a drum set). Conga, bongo and timbales are forming a complex rhythm net, in which each of them has to fulfill slightly different tasks. Since all three instruments are acting together to form a collective groove, each instrument has to be carefully played, not to overlap the others. To understand the role of the timbales in an ensemble, it is helpful to know about the roles of the other two percussion instruments involved.

The fact that congas and timbales have a very different timbre makes it easy to differentiate the two instruments from each other while listening to them. The blend of the instruments creates a very rich sound pattern.

The standard *tumbao* (a very common rhythmical pattern for congas), played by the congas, provides the band with a constant groove of eight notes, with an accentuation of the fourth beat of each bar. Together with the bass, the conga can be seen as a kind of motor that keeps the band going.

The groove and sound of the congas is essential for modern Latin music. In fact, a group that plays salsa can still sound strong, even when it only plays with congas and bongo and no timbales (listen to the recording of 'Quinto Mayor' - 'Salsa con Golpe' and 'Salsa con Golpe 2').

The *bongocero* (person who plays the bongo) can change the overall sound of a band drastically, by playing either the bongo or a hand held bell. A bongocero normally switches to the bell in sections of a song that require high dynamics and a strong pulse. In sections requiring lower dynamics, being the introduction of a song, the verse and a piano solo, the bongocero would play on the bongos. The pattern the bongocero plays on the bongo is called *martillo* and, like the *tumbao* on congas, consists of straight eight notes.

Comparing the three percussion instruments conga, bongo and timbales, it is the timbales that differs from the other two instruments. It has a European classical background (the European timpani) while conga and bongo are African derived, it is

played with sticks while conga and bongo are played with the hands. The timbales has a very sharp and hard sound while conga and bongo have a more round and warm sound. But when listening to the three instruments played at the same time, it is exactly the difference in sound that complements each other and forms a fitting counterpart.

The timbales' role shifted from being an instrument that delivered the basic groove for the danzón orquestas to an instrument whose role it is to not only lay down a basic groove but to emphasize melody lines played by other instruments and to anticipate changes from one section of a song to another.

With the two different tuned drums, the cáscara, the bells and the cymbal, the timbales has many different sound possibilities. One of the most notable sounds of the timbales is the rim-shot (a very loud sound that is archived by hitting the rim and the skin of a drum at the same time). It is often used to mark the beginning and the ending of a section in a song - which leads us directly to the role of the timbales.

The role of the timbales in modern Latin music, like salsa (salsa Cubana), is to introduce new sections of a song, accentuate melody lines and hits played by the horns. The timbalero often emphasizes the difference of a new section in a song by switching to the bells or the cymbal. As a generalized guide line, it can be said that in the introduction and the verse of a song, the timbalero plays the cáscara, in the montuno section (section in which the the singer starts to improvise) he plays the bell and in the *mambo* section (horn section) he plays the cymbal. (Note: These 'rules' are not absolute and only meant as a guide line.)

4.2. THE UNIQUE CUBAN STYLE

An attribute of Cuban musicians that sticks out is the creativity and fearlessness when trying out new things and when combining different musical styles. In the time from the 1970s till today Cuba has been a constant innovator of its own music.

The Afro Cuban culture has been strongly promoted since the beginning of the revolution in 1959, and thus it was the strong African identity that has formed Cuba's music scene like nowhere else.

With the creation of the Cuban son in the 1920s, it is Cuba, that has to be given credit for having laid the foundation for salsa music, which today consists of rhythms from Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and the Dominican Republic (to name a few). Each of these countries contributed their own local rhythms and local music to form styles of salsa that are characteristic for each country. It is not for no reason that we differentiate between these styles as Colombian salsa, Puerto Rican salsa, Venezuelan salsa and so on.

In Cuba as well, the influence of traditional local rhythms, like rumba, has created a special style of playing. The differences in style of playing the timbales in Cuba and countries like Puerto Rico or Colombia, are not only the played patterns. Instead, it is often the different accentuation of common patterns, the phrasing and the overall choice of fills that are played, that makes the difference.

The way a timbalero is playing is very much dependent on the musical genre he is playing in. He will move within the boundaries of that specific style. It is the musical genre that, to a certain extend, defines the way a timbalero is playing the timbales. Therefor one can say that the African tradition, which was one of Cuba's biggest influences to its own music, has influenced the playing of the timbales and other percussion instruments to a great extend.

In a previous chapter I roughly described the evolution of Cuban popular music.

In this chapter I will try to distinguish some of the characteristics of today's Cuban style of playing timbales. Taking the limits of this thesis in account, I decided to focus on mainly two aspects - groove and fills. In the groove section I will list a number of variations of the cáscara pattern as well as the timbales bell pattern, and point out the differences to how they are played outside of Cuba. In the fills section I will have a

look at the *abanico* (a six-stroke roll that ends on the first beat of the following bar) and the *accent on the ponche note* (the fourth beat of a bar). Both can be considered fundamental parts in every timbaleros' repertoire and roughly represent the overall function of the timbales.

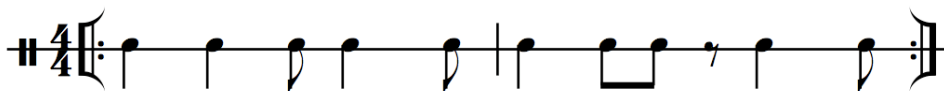
4.2.1. THE CÁSCARA

Apart from being used as a name for the side or shell of the timbales, the *cáscara* also describes a pattern that is used by the timbalero to accompany a band. It is commonly played in sections of a song with low dynamics, like the introduction of a tune or a piano solo. There are many variations to the standard pattern and I want to present some examples that I learned by listening to recordings and from private lessons with Cuban percussionists, such as Roicel Riverón (Manolito y su Trabuco), 'Miguelito' (Cesar 'Pupy' Pedroso), Tomas Ramos Ortiz ('El Panga') and Silvano Mustelier ('El Cocodrilo'). The patterns presented here are not reserved for Cuban players only but were presented to me by Cuban percussionists as the way how the *cáscara* is played in Cuba.

Note that in the examples below the right hand is written above the line and the left hand is written below the line.

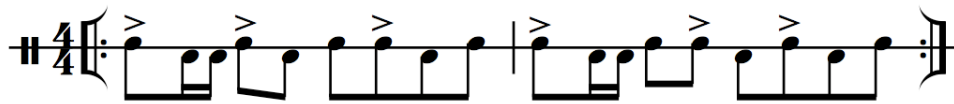
Here is the normal *cáscara* pattern with no accents in a 2-3 clave direction.

example.1

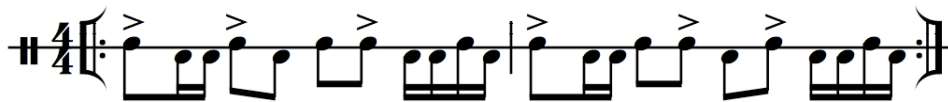


By simply starting the pattern on the second bar one would get the same *cáscara* but in a 3-2 clave direction (*ex.2* on next page).

ex.5

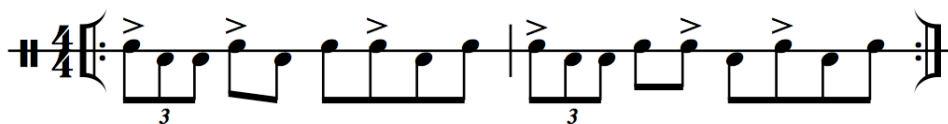


ex.6



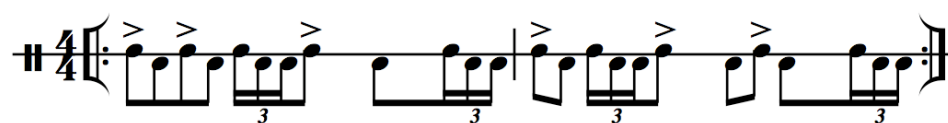
He also stressed the point that some of the ornamentation in the pattern he showed me, could be played either with sixteenth-note or eight-note triplets feeling. Here is a pattern with sixteenth note variations, followed by the same variations played in a triplet feel.

ex.7



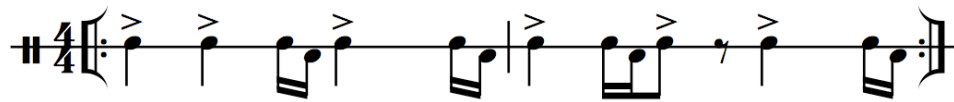
The following pattern is meant for use in slower tempos. It makes use of sixteen-note triplets, that form kind of a very short roll towards each accent of the cáscara pattern.

ex.8



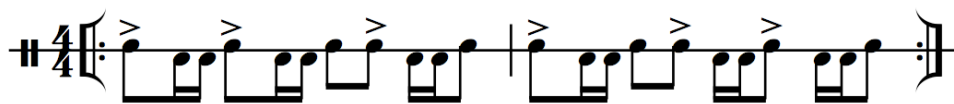
The pattern shown below gives a more open feeling though the right hand continues playing the complete pattern. I have heard this pattern being played in rumba orientated introductions of a salsa tune.

ex.9

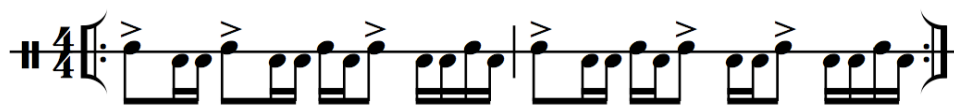


The next two patterns are more meant as an exercise but can also be played as a variation, though this variation might be too busy to be used as an accompanying pattern.

ex.10



ex.11

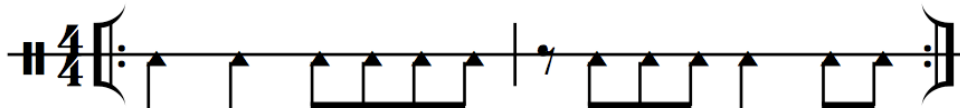


4.2.2. THE BELL PATTERN

Similar to how the bongocero switches between his bongo and the hand held bell, the timbalero switches between playing the cáscara and the mounted bell. While the cáscara is used in sections of low dynamics, the bell is used in sections of high dynamics, like the montuno (coro/pregón) and mambo.

Which pattern is played on the bell often depends on the tempo of a tune and of course the desires of the timbalero. Today it is one bell pattern that has established itself as a standard pattern in salsa music. It is most commonly referred to as the *timbales bell* or *mambo bell* pattern.

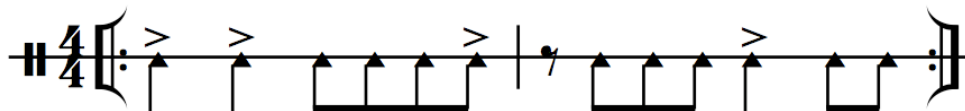
ex.12



Note that all examples shown in this section are written in 2-3 clave direction.

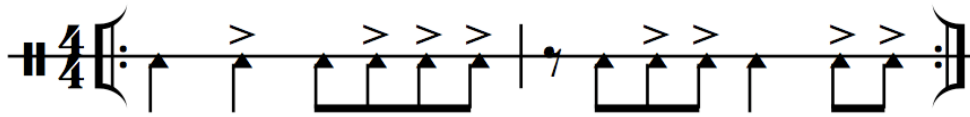
Like mentioned earlier the pattern is not always played with the same accentuation. Cuban timbaleros tend to either play no accents or play it like the following notation shows.

ex.13



Most non Cuban timbaleros would accent the upbeat and not the downbeat, which is reserved for the bongo bell. This way of phrasing gives the groove a special swing that Latin American salsa dancers like so much. In recent years also Cuban timbaleros started to adopt this style of playing the timbales bell (ex. 14 on next page).

ex.14

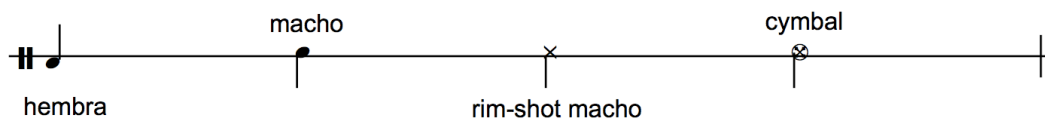


Many non Cuban musician claim that this accentuation is the only correct way to play the timbales bell. Generally Cuban timbaleros are not so strict and are willing to experiment a lot with different patterns.

4.2.3. THE ABANICO

The creativity, when inventing tasteful fills and licks, and the way of phrasing is probably the most characteristic aspect of the Cuban style of playing timbales. One of the most played figures by every timbalero is the abanico. The abanico is a six-stroke roll that ends with a rim-shot on the first beat of the following bar.

In this section I have notated several variations of the standard abanico and how it is played by Cuban timbaleros. Many of the abanicos presented here are notated examples based on the notes I took in the many timbales lessons during my study-trip to Cuba in 2008. For a better understanding I present the a small legend of all the sounds used in the following examples.



An abanico played in a medium to fast tempo would look like this (ex.15 on next page).

ex.19

ex.20

Often timbaleros just extend the roll itself by simply starting it somewhere earlier in the bar. The following five examples show abanicos of different length.

ex.21

ex.22

ex.23

ex.24

ex.25

1 r r l l r r l l r r l l r r l l r

A step further would be to extend the roll with a little fill into the next bar. This is very common for Cuban timbaleros. The next examples present a small collection of ideas of what to play instead of the normal rim-shot on the first beat.

ex.26

l l r r l l r l

ex.27

l l r r l l r l

ex.28

l l r r l l r l r

ex.29

l l r r l l r l r

ex.30

l l r r l l r l r

Another change that can be made to the normal roll (only consisting of doubles) is to use an alternate sticking. This way the timbalero creates a different phrasing and is able to place accents (rim-shots) within the roll. A popular roll ending on the hembra is shown in the next example.

ex.37

Musical notation for example 37 in 4/4 time. The notation shows a roll starting in the second measure, consisting of eighth notes with the sticking pattern *l l r r l r l* written above. The roll ends with a cymbal accent on the final note. The first and third measures contain rests, and the fourth measure contains a cymbal accent.

The next example shows an eight-note triplet roll of rim-shots that ends with a cymbal accent on the one. I would not call it an abanico but it fulfills the same function and thus fits in this section.

ex.38

Musical notation for example 38 in 4/4 time. The notation shows a triplet roll starting in the second measure, consisting of eighth notes with the sticking pattern *r r l r l* written above. The roll ends with a cymbal accent on the final note. The first and third measures contain rests, and the fourth measure contains a cymbal accent.

This can be extended to a half bar roll or even a whole bar eight-note triplet roll utilizing both drums and the cymbal. See the next two examples.

ex.39

Musical notation for example 39 in 4/4 time. The notation shows two triplet rolls starting in the second measure, each consisting of eighth notes with the sticking pattern *r l r l r l* written above. The rolls end with a cymbal accent on the final note. The first and third measures contain rests, and the fourth measure contains a cymbal accent.

ex.40

Musical notation for example 40 in 4/4 time. The notation shows four triplet rolls starting in the second measure, each consisting of eighth notes with the sticking pattern *r l r l r l r l* written above. The rolls end with a cymbal accent on the final note. The first and third measures contain rests, and the fourth measure contains a cymbal accent.

In an conversation with Roicel Riverón, he pointed out that many young timbaleros in Cuba started playing the abanico instead of with the normal six-stroke roll sticking with a seven stroke-roll. Riverón stated that this way the roll would become much more dense and aggressive.

ex.41



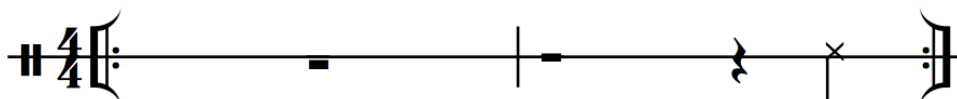
4.2.4. THE ACCENT ON THE PONCHE NOTE

As explained in the ‘Salsa guidebook’ by Rebeca Mauleón “The fourth beat of each measure is accented by patterns of both the rhythm section and the melodic instruments (and/or vocals), throughout the various rhythmic styles of Cuban music.”

It is commonly referred to as *ponche*. Timbaleros often accent the fourth beat of a bar to mark the end or beginning of a section. When played by the whole ensemble, the ponche can also serve as a unison break.

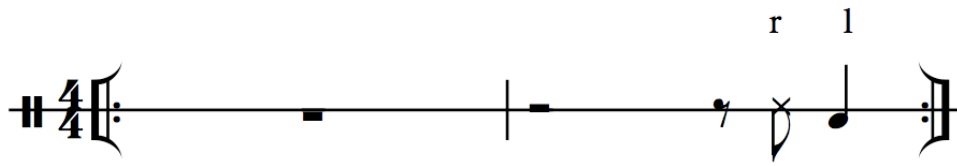
Note that also all examples written in this section are written in 2-3 clave direction.

ex.42



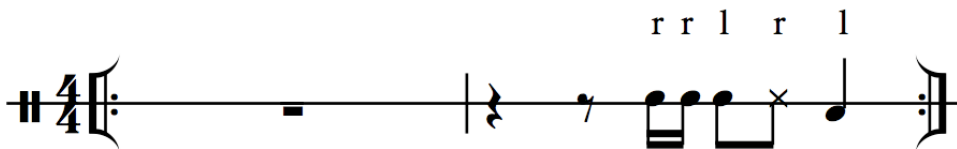
The one-note fill is often extended by a rim-shot on the three+ (ex.43 on next page).

ex.43



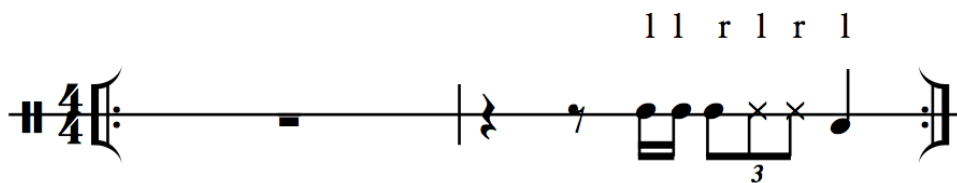
The following example shows a very common fill that is often used to change to a section of lower dynamics.

ex.44



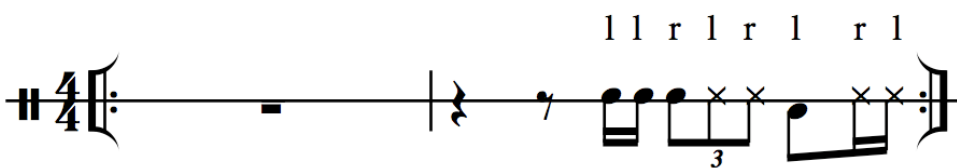
The following fill was shown to me by Roicel Riverón. He makes use of a small eight-note triplet roll before ending on the fourth beat with a hit on the hembra.

ex.45



The following three examples are variations of the previous fill, with an extra accent on the four+.

ex.46



ex.47

ex.48

Another way to make the simple accent on the four a bit more interesting is to leave out the actual accent on the four and instead accent the three+ with a flam.

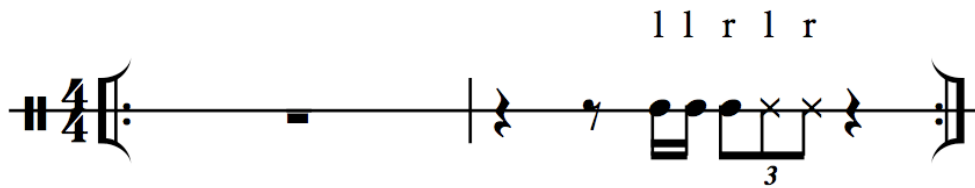
ex.49

One can extend this fill with a sixteenth-note roll.

ex.50

Or just open the flam up so that it would be almost played as a triplet

ex.51



As a small conclusion of this chapter I want to describe one of my first lessons with my Cuban percussion teacher in Hamburg, Germany. After checking my level of playing, he asked me to play for a moment alternating between cáscara and bell. He listened for a moment and then interrupted me to tell me that the fills I was playing were too straight and he wanted me to play around the beat instead to play on the beat. From that day on, each time my playing became too straight for his taste, he would scream out loud “*Contrapunto o muerte*”. For me this quote is a synonym for *the unique Cuban style* of playing timbales.

5. CONCLUSION

My first, and more of a personal, goal in writing this thesis, was to find out about the historical background of the timbales and how they made their way into Cuba and its music. My second goal was of course to satisfactory answer the central question I have given myself.

So how did the timbales become an essential part of Cuban popular music?

In my research I found out, that historically seen, one can dare to say that the timbales are a purely Cuban instrument. Their ancestors reached Cuba at the end of the 18th century, more then 200 years ago. During those 200 years the form, the sound and the way of playing the instrument changed so much, that the timbales became an instrument, equally independent as the European timpani.

I showed that there indeed does exist a unique style of playing timbales in Cuba. This style differs (slightly) from the way timbales are played elsewhere. The influence of rumba and similar African influenced styles of music, is an important factor in the development of a unique Cuban way of playing percussion instruments in general. I tried to outline the style of playing timbales by having a closer look at how Cuban timbaleros play the cáscara, the timbales (mambo) bell, the abanico and the accent on the ponche note. I on purpose limited my research to this four themes, because they perfectly present the most important aspect of the timbales' role in Cuban popular music, which is to mark and emphasize section changes in a tune.

Nobody can deny that the timbales are an essential and fixed part of today's Cuban popular music. This position, or status becomes confirmed by the fact that the timbales have historically grown deeply into Cuban music, like I showed in my research.

But apart from the historical reasons, there is also a social cultural aspect. For many Cubans music is one of the few possibilities to express themselves, and the timbales offer a way to express themselves in a highly artistic manner. Instruments such as the conga, the bongo, the Cuban *tres* (Cuban guitar like instrument) and the timbales that are somehow representatives for the Cuban identity and Cubans are very proud to call these instruments their own. When asking a Cuban person if he/she can play

one of the above mentioned instruments, the answer often may sound something like “Yes of course... I’m Cuban. I have it in my blood.”

During my research the speculative question, of why the timbales did not vanish from the Cuban music scene, arose in me. I imagined that the growing popularity of non Cuban music inside Cuba and the introduction of the drum set, could have led to an end for styles of music in which musicians would make use of the timbales. The Cuban government may have promoted Afro Cuban music but those styles traditionally did not make use of the timbales. One of the reason I see that prevented musical styles, that make use of the timbales, from disappearing, was the introduction of salsa music, in which the timbales play an essential role. Music from Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Colombia and other Latin American countries gained great popularity and Cuban musicians started playing their own version of salsa music, called salsa Cubana.

I hope that I could present an interesting assemblage of information and an answer to my central question. I very much enjoyed reading about the history of Cuban music and to compile my findings in this research project.

I want to dedicate this thesis to Silvano Mustelier, without whom I would have never decided to study music. And I want to thank Nils Fischer (who would immediately answer questions) and Jan Hartong (who saved me from letting my project become to big, by advising me to narrow it to the Cuban way of playing timbales).

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