

CONVERSATIONS IN CLAVE

The Ultimate Technical Study of Four-Way
Independence in Afro-Cuban Rhythms

- Fundamental concepts of the clave and Afro-Cuban rhythms
- Dexterity, independence and four-way coordination exercises
- Developing improvisational ideas
- Stylistic groove transcriptions: Cascara, Guaguanco, Mambo, Macuta, Songo, Mozambique

*Transcriptions and
Annotations by Ken Ross*

by Horacio Hernandez



"El Negro" at Carriage House Studios, Stamford, CT.

About the Author



Grammy Award winner and internationally renowned recording artist Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez was born in Havana, Cuba, into a family with rich musical heritage, deeply rooted in traditional Cuban music and well-versed in American jazz currents. His own talent became evident early. At age twelve, "El Negro" was accepted by the prestigious Escuela Nacional de Arte, where he majored in drums and percussion. There he studied with the finest Cuban teachers, including Fausto Garcia Rivera, himself a student of famed American teachers Lawrence Stone and Henry Adler, and Enrique Pla, the drummer for the ground-breaking group "Irakere," and Santiago Rieter, the most influential of modern Cuban drummer-percussionists.

While still very young, Horacio began to work professionally in the group of well known Cuban saxophonist Nicolas Reynoso. As part of the exciting musical scene of 1980s Havana, he worked with all its dominant musicians; among them Paquito D'Rivera, Lucia Huergo, Arturo Sandoval, and German Velazco. He quickly became the most in-demand drummer of Egrem, the major recording studios in Cuba and making hundreds of recordings with them.

In 1980, "Negro" joined Cuban pianist and composer Gonzalo Rubalcaba's innovative group, "Proyecto." He played, toured and recorded with the group for ten years. Though he continued to work and record with the best Cuban and international musicians, including Dizzy Gillespie's United Nations Orchestra, it was with Rubalcaba that he developed his distinct drumming style—the potent mixture of Afro-Cuban and jazz elements that has made him an artist of extraordinary power and musical versatility.

He moved to Rome in 1990 and soon became the energizing force in that city's jazz and Latin music circles, working and recording with Pino Danielle, Gary Bartz, Steve Turre, Gary Smulyan and Mike Stern. He also formed his own band Tercer Mundo. During his stay in Rome he chaired the Latin Percussion department of the Centro di Percussione Timba and taught at the Universita della Musica, while also conducting many drum clinics throughout Italy.

Hernandez arrived in New York in 1993 and immediately began to work with such celebrated jazz musicians as Paquito D'Rivera, Dave Valentin, Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band, the Ed Simon Trio, Anthony Jackson, Kip Hanrahan, David Sanchez, Papo Vazquez, Steve Turre and the Sanctified Shells, Santi Debriano and the Panamaniacs, the Cepeda family's Afro-Rican Jazz, Giovanni Hidalgo, Arturo Sandoval, Regina Carter, Chico O'Farrill and Tito Puente, as well as with In the Spirit, a rhythm and blues/rock/funk band.

"El Negro" was also a member of the Michel Camilo Trio, playing percussion on Camilo's original soundtrack for the film *Two Much*. He was the featured drummer for San Francisco's memorable concert, *Irakere West*, lead by famed Cuban pianist, Chucho Valdes, with special guest star Carlos Santana. He has become a member of the Tropi-Jazz All-Stars



under the direction of Tito Puente, a band that includes Hilton Ruiz, Eddie Palmieri, Giovanni Hidalgo, Dave Valentin, Juan Pablo Torres and Charlie Sepulveda among other Latin greats.

After several international engagements as a guest artist with Roy Hargrove's Crisoul band, (the band features Hargrove, Gary Bartz,

Frank Lacey, David Sanchez, Changuito, Jon Benitez, Anga Diaz, Russel Malone and Chucho Valdes), Hernandez joined the band to record their first CD entitled *Habana*. This debut recording earned Crisoul the 1997 Grammy Award for best recording in the Latin-jazz category.

Horacio also recorded with Michel Camilo, John Patitucci and Anthony Jackson on a Camilo release entitled "Thru My Eyes." "El Negro's" true essence is captured on the track "A Night in Tunisia." He has also appeared with McCoy Tyner.

In 1997 Negro toured with Santana and recorded two tracks for Santana's Grammy Award-winning "Supernatural" recording.

He is a member of the faculty of the Drummer's Collective and the New School in New York and the Percussion Institute of Technology in Los Angeles, where he is teaching as part of the Master Artists series with Steve Houghton and Gary Chaffee. He also conducts regular workshops at the prestigious Berklee School of Music in Boston and the Stanford University Jazz Workshop in Palo Alto. Horacio is an endorser and clinician for Pearl Drums and Zildjian cymbals and has been a featured artist at numerous industry events, including NAMM and the Percussive Arts Society International Convention.

Table of Contents

Part 1

Fundamental Concepts of the Clave	11
The Clave Rhythm	13
Rumba Clave	14
Combination Phrasing	15
Clave Phrasing: Rhythmic Analysis.....	16
Clave Phrasing Exercises	18

Part 2

Achieving Dexterity With the Clave	19
Technical Exercises.....	21
Rhythmic Permutations With Rumba Clave	21
Rumba Clave With One-Note Variations	22
Creative Exercises	30
Melodic Permutations With Rumba Clave	30

Part 3

Fundamental Concepts of the Cascara Rhythm	31
The Cascara	33

Part 4

Achieving Dexterity With the Cascara Rhythm	35
Technical Exercises.....	37
Rhythmic Permutations With the Cascara	37
Creative Exercises	45
Melodic Permutations With the Cascara Rhythm	45
Applications in Improvisation.....	56

Part 5

Fundamental Concepts of Afro-Cuban $\frac{6}{8}$	57
$\frac{6}{8}$ Clave	59
Technical Exercises.....	60
Rhythmic Permutations With the Afro-Cuban $\frac{6}{8}$ Clave	60
Creative Exercises	66
Melodic Permutations With the Afro-Cuban $\frac{6}{8}$ Clave	66
Applications in Improvisation.....	69
Variations for $\frac{6}{8}$ Rhythms	70

Part 6

Advanced Systems	71
Technical Exercises.....	73
Preparatory Patterns and Combinations.....	73
Hand Exercises Over Clave With Foot	74
Cascara Independence Exercise	75
Bass Drum Patterns	77
Hihat Patterns	78
Cascara Variations.....	81
System Exercises	82
Creative Exercises	98

Part 7

Groove Transcriptions.....	97
Introduction	99
$\frac{6}{8}$ Grooves for Drum Set	100
Guaguancó	102
Mambo	103
Conga and Comparsas	105
Cascara Groove.....	107
Macuta	108
Cha Cha Cha	109
Merengue	110
Songo.....	111
Mozambique	112
Recorded Grooves	113
Mambo de la Luna	113
Sin Saber Porque	114

Part 8

Supplemental Materials.....	118
Left Hand Variations.....	116
Left Hand Variations: Master Sets	116
Melodic Exercises: Master Sets	124
Melodic Exercises.....	124
Selected Discography	135

The Clave Rhythm

The key to understanding Cuban music begins with the clave. The word, literally translated, means key. With this key we can learn how to phrase and interpret the music with authenticity and the correct feel.

The clave is a two-measure rhythm that serves as a reference point for all the rhythms, melodies, song-forms, and dances in Cuban music. This clave rhythm is always present in the music, even if it is not actually being played.

There are four basic clave patterns in Cuban music. The son clave, rumba clave, $\frac{6}{8}$ clave, and the Bembe clave. The two-measure pattern can either be 2:3 (meaning with two beats in the first measure and

three beats in the second measure), or 3:2 (meaning three beats in the first measure and two beats in the second measure).

Within the arrangement of a piece of music the direction of the clave may be either 3:2 or 2:3 in any given section. The exception is the Bembe clave. Once set in motion, the “direction” of the clave never changes.

It is important to understand and master these four clave patterns and their related concepts—how to hear, feel, and phrase them—before moving forward. This section lays the foundation for the remaining material in this book and your control of this material is essential.

Audio Note: On the recording the following examples are played on a woodblock. They can also be played on any sound source on your drum set—side of floor tom, rim of a drum, closed hihat, cymbal bell, cowbell and the like.



1. Rumba Clave



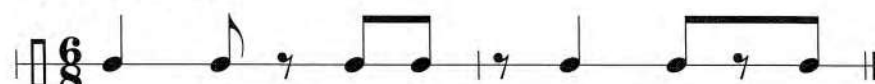
2. Son Clave



3. 6/8 Clave



4. Bembe Clave



Clave Phrasing: Rhythmic Analysis

These exercises are written in cut-time— $\frac{2}{2}$ —a common meter in Afro-Cuban music. Notice how the $\frac{6}{8}$ feel translates to triplets in cut-time. Try playing Exercises 1 through 8 on two sound sources while

tapping your foot in two pulses to the measure. If you play only the clave rhythm (the “x” noteheads), you will hear a certain “elasticity” in the rhythm.

Audio Note: On the recording the following examples are played on a woodblock and the snare drum. They can be played on any two distinct sound sources on your set.



1.



2.



3.



4.

Clave Phrasing Exercises

The following exercises continue with the techniques and concepts presented in the last section. The notation in this section presents another way of looking at the rhythms, but the underlying elements—the elasticity of the feel and the superimposed

duple and triple meter—remain the same. Practicing these exercises will help you get the correct phrasing of the clave rhythm while naturally incorporating this simultaneous duple-triple rhythmic combination.

Audio Note: In these examples the clave rhythm—"x" noteheads—is played on a woodblock, the standard notes on the snare drum and the left foot is playing the downbeats of each bar—the "1" of each bar—on the hihat.



1.

2.



3.

4.



5.

6.



7.

8.