

Tito Puente's

Drumming with the Mambo King

by Tito Puente and Jim Payne



**Face the
Music**
Productions

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Tito Puente

King of the Timbales

*"There is a rose in Spanish Harlem,
A red rose up in Spanish Harlem..."**

WHEN YOU CUT THROUGH THE ROMANCE AND GET INTO THE STREETS, SPANISH HARLEM, THE LEGENDARY BIRTHPLACE OF AFRO-CUBAN MUSIC IN NORTH AMERICA, IS NOT THAT BIG AND IT'S NOT THAT BEAUTIFUL. A LONG NARROW SLICE OF MANHATTAN, "EL BARRIO" OR THE DISTRICT, AS RESIDENTS CALL IT, LIES SQUEEZED EAST-TO-WEST BETWEEN 3RD AND 5TH AVENUES AND

STRETCHES FROM BLACK HARLEM'S FAMOUS 125TH STREET SOUTH TO 96TH STREET, WHERE THE ELEGANT UPPER EAST SIDE BEGINS. A high, blackened stone wall, the track-bed of the Harlem and New Haven Railroad, bisects the neighborhood, and pedestrians have to walk through dank, narrow tunnels to pass from one side to the other. It's a checkerboard neighborhood, blocks of weather-beaten apartment buildings, five- and six-story walkups, interspersed with weedy vacant lots. Steel gates to keep out burglars cover the apartment windows, and every night shopkeepers roll down ribbed metal armor over their storefronts and secure it with heavy-duty padlocks. Trash cans overflow onto the streets and sidewalks.

The "Barrio" of Spanish Harlem vibrates with rich traditions and down-to-earth culture. The smell of fried plantains and rice and beans drifts out into the streets from red- and yellow-fronted bodegas and delicatessens. The sweet-hot sounds of Latin music fill the air from speakers in front of mom-and-pop record stores and from car radios. In the summer, girls chalk hopscotch

squares on the sidewalks, and boys play stickball games between parked cars. Housewives lean out of first floor windows to chat with friends, while old men sit on folding chairs by worn stone stoops and play cards and dominos. The avenues teem with traffic, and the honking horns and the rumble of the subway coming up through the pavement announce that El Barrio is in one of the world's largest cities, New York, with its glittering skyscrapers and rushing crowds, a city where the best and the worst of everything, the haves and have-nots, exist side by side. In El Barrio it's easy to see what you can get if you're lucky and where you could end up if you're not.

Tito Puente, recognized as the world's greatest timbale player and Latin music's best-loved goodwill ambassador, was born in Spanish Harlem and was educated in its schools and in its streets. Combining the musical heritage he learned there with his own determination and energy, he became one of the most successful Latin bandleaders of all time. But whether he's playing at Carnegie Hall or a concert to benefit his scholar-

*Lyrics from "Spanish Harlem," Ben E. King, 1961, writers: Jerry Leiber and Phil Spector.

A Brief History

of Afro-Cuban Music

*"Cuban music is voices and drums, the rest is a luxury."
—Orlando Marin, bandleader.*

WHEN THE SPANISH CAME TO THE NEW WORLD IN THE 1500S, THEY COLONIZED A LARGE ISLAND NAMED CUBANICAN OR "CENTER PLACE." ITS LONG, NARROW LAND MASS LAY BETWEEN FLORIDA TO THE NORTH, SANTO DOMINGO AND PUERTO RICO TO THE EAST, JAMAICA TO THE SOUTH, AND MEXICO TO THE WEST. THROUGH FIVE CENTURIES, CUBA HAS REMAINED THE CROSSROADS OF THE CARIBBEAN, SENDING ITS FINE SUGARS AND TOBACCOS TO THE WORLD and accepting to its shores waves of settlers from many races and nations.

Any melting pot of cultures becomes a melting pot of music, and Cuba is no exception. People as different as aristocrats from France and slaves from the Congo; deities as distinct as Mary the Virgin Mother and Changó the God of Thunder; cities as unlike as Havana and Hollywood; musical instruments as diverse as codfish crates and violins; dances as different as the minuet and the mambo—all have contributed their colors and flavors to the fascinating stew that is Cuban music.

It's hard to pin down the beginnings of a music composed from so many blended elements, but the heart of Cuban music is

a combination of Africa and Europe: Africa contributed its rhythmic percussion and vocal chants, and Europe its melodic instruments, songs and dances.

Through much of its history, Cuba has been a poor country. Centuries of making do have taught the proud and resourceful Cuban people that you don't need much to have a good time making music. If you didn't have a drum, a good-sounding wooden box would do, or a cowbell, even a hoe blade; to the beats of these instruments, men or women could dance and sing stories of their sufferings and joys. When that music of the rural peasants and African slaves mingled with the music of the urban upper class a century and more ago, modern Cuban music, now known and loved around the world as salsa, was born.

I-African Roots

Black Gods Are Dancing Gods.⁽¹⁾

Soon after Columbus discovered the Americas, colonists from Spain, France and England began bringing Africans from Nigeria, Dahomey, the Congo and many

other nations to the New World as slaves. If they survived the gruelling trip in the holds of sailing ships, they were soon bought by planters and put to work as laborers in the fields, growing the sugar and tobacco which would enrich their new

clarinet with the **Havana Philharmonic**. After coming to the U.S. in 1930, he was introduced to the group, **Cuarteto Machin**, a band getting ready to record and looking for a trumpet player. Bass clarinetist Bauzá wasn't fazed. He learned to play the trumpet in two weeks and played on the session! Next he got a job with **Noble Sissle's Orchestra** at the Park Central Hotel playing saxophone, going on to play with **Hi Clark and His Missouriians**, and then drummer **Chick Webb's** band as lead trumpeter in 1933. He became the band's director a year later. In 1939 Bauzá joined **Cab Calloway**, whose repertoire featured several Latin-influenced pieces, including "Minnie the Moocher." Thoroughly versed in all aspects of Cuban music, Bauzá was now becoming an expert in American jazz as well.

When he went into partnership with Machito to form **Machito and His Afro-Cubans**, Bauzá set out to bring together the best elements of Latin and jazz. "Our idea was to bring Latin music up to the standard of the American orchestras,"⁽⁷⁾ he explained. He brought in **John Barte** and other arrangers who had worked with Chick Webb and Cab Calloway, and their charts incorporated the most modern big band voicings for saxes and trumpets. The group perfected their sound for months in rehearsals before their first appearance. (Tito Puente no doubt saw them playing at the Park Plaza Ballroom opposite **Federico Pagani's Happy Boys**.) Machito and His Afro-Cubans set a high standard for Latin music for many years to come. They spent four years as the house band at La Conga on 53rd between 7th Ave. and Broadway,



Machito and His Afro-Cubans. This picture was taken during a 1948 Columbia Pictures movie short titled "Machito and his Rumba Band," which featured female singer Buddy Riley. Machito, center. First row from the left: Leslie Johnakins, baritone sax; José Pin Madera, tenor sax; Eugene Johnson, tenor sax; Fred Skeritt, alto sax; Armando Punzalen, tenor sax. Second row from the left: Jimmy Lawrence, Mario Bauzá, Bobby Woodland, trumpets; Fernando Arbelo, trombone/arranger; Humberto Gelabert, trombone. Third row from the left: Carlos Vidal, congas; José Mangual, bongos; Ubaldo Nieto, drumset; René Hernandez, piano; Julio Andino, bass.

D. The Pulse

The basic pulse of Afro-Cuban music is usually two beats per measure. In other words, it is felt in "2." It is usually written using the time signature symbol: ϕ . Cut time is simply up-tempo 4/4 in which the pulse is felt on "1" and "3."

1-6 3:2 Son Clave with pulse



1-7 2:3 Son Clave with pulse



1-8 3:2 Rumba Clave with pulse



1-9 2:3 Rumba Clave with pulse



Tito Talks

Q: Do composers start with the Clave and say, "I'm going to write a song in 3:2 Clave?"

TP: Most composers know Clave. If they were going to write a tune in 3:2 Clave, they would compose a tune according to the 3:2 feeling. They have that feeling in their head while they're writing.

But, hey, a composer in the Latin field could be a guy who's taking a shower and he's singing a tune. Now what does he know about Clave? He's got a lyric and a melody—he's washing his armpits and drying up. And when he steps out of the shower, all of sudden he has a composition. Then he gives it to somebody else: "Hey, I got a tune for you."

It used to happen to me all the time. Some people will sing the song a capella, without any meter. Sometimes they don't have a piano or guitar or any basic rhythm and you don't even know where the downbeat is. When you get a fragment like that, you have to decide "this feels better in 2:3 Clave" or "this feels better in 3:2 Clave" according to the melody. The melody was there already. You have to decide on the Clave according to the melody. When you write the syncopation in the arrangement for the brass and the saxes, it's got to



Photo by Eleonora Alberto

B. The Rhythms of the Mambo

The basic Cás cara and Bell patterns for the Mambo are similar to those already described in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

9-1 The standard Cás cara in 2:3 Clave is:

9-2 Drumset players—Add Bass Drum, HiHat and Left Hand patterns

9-3 The standard Mambo Bell pattern in 2:3 Clave is:

9-4 Drumset players—Add Bass Drum, HiHat and Left Hand patterns

Tito Plays Mambo Patterns

9-5 (♩ = 83)

2:3



CHAPTER 10

TITO'S MUSIC

Part 2~Mambo

*"There was no question about what Tito had done to the music. He took it light-years ahead. When 'Dance Mania' came out, that's all you heard for three years."
—Max Salazar.*



Tito Talks

Henry Adler gave me a big box full of cowbells that somebody had sent him from Texas. Some guy there had stolen them off real cows, cut them off and sent them to him. In fact those are the bells that I used in my early recordings—sharp and beautiful. Everybody loved those bells—the real sound. People stole them on the gigs. I used them on **Dance Mania**.

In those days we only recorded on 4 tracks, but you can hear everything I played. Nowadays they got mics on everything, and when the mixing comes they're all mixed up.



10-1 "Saca Tu Mujer"-Original Recording

From the album *Dance Mania Vol. 1*. Tito Puente & His Orchestra.

1957 Release. Reissued 1991. CD BMG/Tropical Series 2467

Vocals: Santito Colón

MUSICIANS: Leader, timbales, marimbas: Tito Puente; Trumpets: Bernie Glow, Jimmy Frisaura, Frank Lo Pinto, George Lopez, Gene Rapetti, Larry Moser, Leon Merian; Saxophones: Rafael Palau, Jerry Sanfino, Schepp Pullman, Tony Buonpastore; Piano: Raymond Concepcion; Bass: Bobby Rodríguez; Cuban percussion: Ray Barretto, Julito Collazo, Ray Rodriguez; Chorus: Vitin Aviles, Otto Olivar, Santitos Colon

Composed and Arranged by: Tito Puente

Courtesy of BMG RECORDS

$\text{♩} = 100$

DUMS

OYE COMO VA

(PIANO) 7

BELL (CHA-CHA)

PLAY 15 BARS

PLAY NO. 4B.

(Bell)

2

BOOM

(CYMBAL)

PLAY 23 BARS



16-5 "Mambo Beat"-Original Recording

From the album *Mambo Beat...The Progressive Side of Tito Puente*. Recorded April 12, 1957. Reissued 1994 RCA, CD BMG/Tropical Series 74321-23870-2

MUSICIANS: Tito Puente: Composer, Arranger & Timbales; Trumpets: Doc Severinsen, Andrés "Merenguito" Forda & Nick Travis; Trombone: Eddie Bert; Tenor Sax: Marty Holmes; Alto Sax: Gene Quill & Allen Fields; Baritone Sax : Joe Grimm; Guitar: Howard Collins & Barry Galbraith; Bongos: Willie Bobo; Congas: Mongo Santamaria; Bass: Evaristo Baro or Bobby Rodríguez; Drums and Percussion: Jimmy Cobb, Ted Sommer, Carlos "Patato" Valdes, Julito Collazo & Candido Camero.

Composed by: Tito Puente.

Courtesy of BMG RECORDS

$\text{♩} = 105$

DRUMS

MAMBO BEAT

(PLAY MAMBO BELL) (2-3 CLAVE)

(SAXES)

(TRPTS)

(PLAY JAZZ RIDE) (A) (B)

(BELL) (MAMBO)

PLAY 16 BARS

16-7 "Mambo Beat" Solo Transcription

$\text{♩} = 105$

2:3 Clave

Mambo Beat - Solo

The musical score is written on a single staff in 2/4 time. It consists of 36 measures, numbered 1 through 36. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and triplets. Accents (>) are placed above many notes. Measure 4 contains a series of sixteenth notes with accents (>>>>). Measures 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 feature triplet markings over groups of three notes. The piece concludes with a final note in measure 36.

16-9 "Ti Mon Bo" Solo Transcription

$\text{♩} = 67$

2:3 Clave

Ti Mon Bo - Solo

The musical score is written on ten staves, numbered 1 through 30. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with many accents (>) and triplets (3). The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Measure 23 contains two plus signs (+ +) and an asterisk (*), indicating a specific performance technique. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 30.

*Indicates "dead-sticking"