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# THE CLAVE

'La Clave' (klah-vay) is the most crucial element in Latin Afro-Caribbean Music. The clave is an underlying ostinato rhythmic pattern on which the music is rhythmically based. This pattern is played on two wooden sticks about one inch in diameter by eight inches in length called by the same name, "claves". It is also played on a woodblock. It is believed the clave was born out of the 6/8 rhythms of the African tribes and that originally there were many claves that were used by Nigerian and Congolese slaves.

Afro-Cuban Music, Salsa, Merengue and Bossa Novas all have a clave. Much like Jazz and Rock in which two and four are the strong beats, clave is the underlying accent in these musics. They must be composed and performed with the clave in mind. Afro-Cuban composers naturally write with an internalized knowledge of the clave. A musician, singer, or writer well versed in this idiom automatically hears and feels if a melodic phrase or rhythmic pattern is "cruzado" crossed or inverted with the clave pattern.

The clave used today is either "rumba/guaguanco clave" or "son clave". This rhythmic pattern encompasses a total of four beats (two measures in 2/2 time, Illus. 1). Clave 3:2 means three accents followed by two. They can be inverted with the "two-side" of the clave at the beginning of the phrase (two accents followed by three). Percussion patterns, piano and bass tumbaos, melodies and any improvised riffs or solos must adhere to these accents.

## Illustration 1

Son Clave 3:2



Rumba/Guaguanco Clave 3:2



Son Clave 2:3 (Inverted)



Rumba/Guaguanco Clave 2:3 (Inverted)



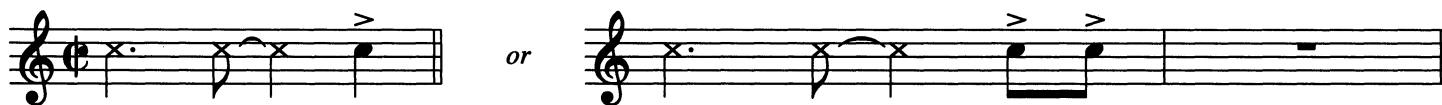
## INTROS & ENDINGS

Intros and endings in Afro-Cuban music are for the most part dependent on the clave; although sometimes rules are broken at the very end of a tune. As a rule of thumb, endings are played on the last accented note or notes of a phrase or on a down beat. Many times one part or both sections of the clave are played as the ending of a tune (Example A). Endings usually occur either on the last accent (quarter note) or the last two eighth notes of the “3” part of the clave (Example B). Although it is not very commonly used, some endings occur on only the first quarter note of either measure of the clave. A more commonly used first beat ending is two accented eighth notes (Example C). Some endings outline part of the clave (Example D), while adding notes in between the accents (Example E). There are also endings that partially outline the clave (Example F).

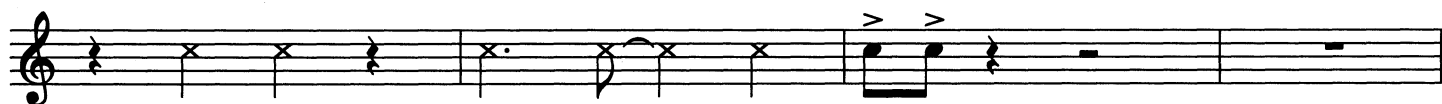
### Example A



### Example B



### Example C



### Example D



### Example E



### Example F



# MERENGUE



Track 20

Implied 3:2 Clave

Piano Example 19

C Em7

Fmaj7 G7 1. - 7.

8. G7 C