# : Latin America

## Introduction: Latin America

Located in the Western Hemisphere, South America is a vast continent that includes twelve independent countries and three major territories. The term Latin America is sometimes used to refer to countries and territories in South America because European colonisation resulted in Romance languages (mainly Spanish, Portuguese, French) being spoken widely in these countries. However, the term Latin America extends beyond South America and includes territories and countries in southern parts of the United States, Central America (including Mexico) and the Caribbean where Romance languages are spoken.

Ancient civilizations and empires such as the Maya, Aztec, Nazca and Inca contributed significantly to the formation of highly structured political, religious and cultural systems in this continent, influences which can still be found today. Christopher Columbus's discovery of the New World in 1492 C.E. soon led to widespread European colonisation. Diseases brought by the conquerors wiped out many indigenous populations as they had no biological resistance to foreign diseases. A new source of labour was required to work in the mines and agricultural plantations and came in the form of slaves brought over from west Africa. Gradually, as the colonisers settled in different parts of the continent, inter-marriages took place resulting in a large number of people of mixed African and Iberian ancestry among the present-day population in many parts of South America. Although the indigenous population greatly diminished in many places with the military conquests of the Europeans, a great number of indigenous tribes in the rainforests of the Amazonian jungle were largely left undisturbed until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The complex history and historical interactions in Central and South America played a substantial role in the music and musical activities of the diverse peoples of this region. While folk musical traditions are still found in rural areas and among indigenous tribes, music in urban areas is a melting pot of influences from Europe and West Africa.

Candidates do not need to study music from the whole of Latin America, but should be taught about the instruments and musical features of Argentinian Tango and Cuban Son, which are described in the following sections. The instruments or terms specific to this world focus with which candidates should be familiar are printed in **bold**. Detailed information has been provided on the history and socio-cultural contexts of each style for the benefit of teachers; candidates should have a general awareness of the background to each style, but will not be tested in detail on this.

## Argentina

Argentina lies in the southern-most part of South America mainly between Chile and Uruguay, and bordering Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and the South Atlantic Ocean. It is the second largest country in South America after Brazil. Before the arrival of the Spanish in the early sixteenth century, it was largely occupied by diverse groups of hunter-gatherers with some agricultural settlements. By 1580, Argentina had been successfully colonised by Spain and a Spanish settlement began in Buenos Aires. The Spanish ruled Argentina for 230 years until 1810 when a rebellion overturned the Spanish rule. Its population today is around 43 million: about 97 per cent are of white European descent and the remaining 3 per cent are of mixed white and Amerindian ancestry (mestizo).

Today, the most representative form of Argentinian music is the Tango; however, folk music can still be found in the rural and mountainous areas. Since the 1960s, music from the Caribbean islands has also influenced urban musical forms in Argentina; genres such as the *cumbia*, *salsa*, *son*, *reggae* are often heard in urban cities.

## Argentinian Tango

## 1 Background

Tango is a dance and music form that rose to popularity in Buenos Aires in the late 1800s. It started among the lower-middle classes in bars, cafés, brothels, dance halls and clubs. At that time, a large number of immigrants from Europe, particularly Spanish and Italian, arrived in Argentina. The arrival of the new immigrants brought the waltz, polka and mazurka.

The slave trade brought African dances and songs into the country, which also influenced nineteenth-century Argentinian music. Dances such as the African Argentine *candombes* were performed on stage; the *contradanza* from Cuba, based on an African rhythm pattern and known as the *habanera* (dance of Havana) outside Cuba, was popular and is one of the main influences on the birth of tango. Dance halls in Buenos Aires were a melting-pot of different groups of people and provided the meeting place for all these different dance forms.

In the early stages of its development, the tango was rejected by the upper class who considered it to be marginal, immoral and indecent. When it travelled to Paris and other European cities and New York in the first decade of the twentieth century, it was very well received. Following this international popularity it was taken up by high society in Buenos Aires and a 'cleaned-up', stylized version of the dance grew in popularity in urban Buenos Aires and other urban centres. It remained just as popular in lower-class neighbourhoods, although the styles remained distinct.

The early history and development of the tango was closely linked to Argentine society. Tango music and dance tell the story of many different people with its lyrics telling of nostalgia and longing for left behind homelands. As political and social changes broke down the various social classes, diverse immigrant communities and ethnic groups were brought together.

The 1920s saw the maturing of tango music and the emergence of a great number of dance bands led by magnificent bandleaders and instrumentalists. The tango also became a popular song form. From 1935 to 1950, the media of film and radio played an important role in spreading its popularity, winning over new audiences and attracting more professional musicians and singers. Many tango orchestras emerged and the best tango artists were recorded. Larger orchestras and ensembles replaced the original sextet. Previously, singers had only sung the refrain but during this period they acquired a new status as soloists.

During the 1950s and 1960s, tango's popularity as a dance form waned a little, although intellectuals and musicians/composers such as the classically-trained Astor Piazzola injected new interest into it as a music of lyric and poetry. Publication of the song lyrics and the study of the dialect used in the early tango songs altered its status as tango became more intellectual and listener-oriented. The earlier period (1930s to 1950s) became the 'golden age' of tango while the newer form introduced by Astor Piazzola became the Tango Nuevo.

The 1980s saw the resurgence of tango once again as a dance form. Interests abroad (e.g. in America, Europe and Japan) brought a renaissance of the dance among the middle and upper classes in big Argentinian cities. Tango's popularity worldwide was a result of the international activity of the composer Astor Piazzolla, pianist Horacio Salgán, singers such as Susana Rimaldi and Edmundo Rivero, and tango bands led by Osvaldo Pugliese and Alfredo de Angelis. International dance choreographers including Maurice Béjart (Belgium), Dimitri Vassiliev (Russia), Pina Bausch (Germany) and outstanding Argentinian dancers Julio Bocca, Milena Plebs and Miguel Angel Zotto contributed to a growing awareness of the genre. Contemporary tango music fusing electronic elements into traditional tango can also be found. Today, there are academies and universities in Buenos Aires to research and study the tango.

# 2 Instruments

The most distinctive instrument in most tango orchestras or bands is the *bandoneon*. It was invented in the mid-nineteenth century and was so named by the German instrument dealer Heinrich Band. It was brought over to South America around 1870 by immigrants, sailors and missionaries and soon adopted into the tango orchestra.

It is a type of free-reed button box accordion having two hexagonal wooden manuals (keyboards) separated by a bellows. *Bandoneons* vary from 50 to 71 buttons, the classic size adopted by tango players being the one with 71 buttons. The right-hand buttons play the melody and left-hand buttons play chords. It is held between both hands and played by pushing and pulling the bellows to compress the air which passes through a series of free metal reeds to produce the tones. Dynamic variations are produced by squeezing or drawing the air through the instrument more quickly for greater volume or more slowly for a softer volume.

Tango music may be purely instrumental or may include a vocalist. In the early stages of its development, tango music could be performed by any of the following instrumentation: one *bandoneon* and two guitars; a *bandoneon*, a violin, flute and a guitar; a clarinet, violin and a piano; or a violin, a piano and a *bandoneon*. The 1920s saw the appearance of solo performers and a larger orchestra, known as *orquesta tipica*, which usually comprises a string section (violins, viola and cello), a *bandoneon* section (3 or more *bandoneons*), and a rhythm section of piano and double bass. The *orquestas tipicas* were most popular during the 'Golden Age' of tango from about 1930 to 1952. Since the 1980s, tango music ensembles tend to be smaller combinations of trios, quartets or sextets.

# 3 Musical Features

## Rhythm

Tango music is typically in 2/4 or 4/4 time. A distinguishing feature of tango music is syncopation. Syncopation rhythm in tango music is characteristically the playing of notes between the beat and with an emphasis or accent on these notes. The basis of syncopated rhythm in tango music is the **habanera** (Figure 1).

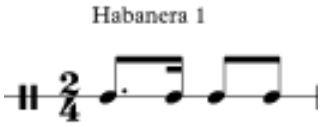


**Figure 1**

Two variations of the habanera rhythmic pattern are also common in tango music (Figure 2).

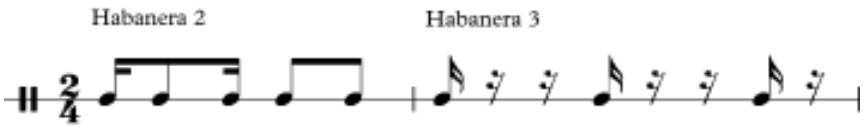


**Figure 2**

These patterns are used in a great variety of ways in the music. They usually form the accompanying rhythmic pattern, but also frequently appear in the melody.

Although syncopated rhythm is a distinctive feature in tango, the marking of the beat is also important. This is known as playing '**marcado**' which is Spanish for 'marked'. Marcado rhythm is the playing of notes on the beat in time, without syncopation. In 4/4 time when all four beats are marked (although beats 1 and 3 are emphasized more than the others), this rhythm is known as 'marcado in four'. When only two of the four beats (beats 1 and 3) are played, this rhythm is called 'marcado in two'. Both the marcado and syncopated rhythm are articulated in tango music to create the quintessential 'feel' of the genre.

## Dynamics and articulation

Tango music sounds intense and dramatic, its dramatic intensity arising from the use of dynamics and articulation in the playing. Very often, marcado rhythms are marked by short staccato phrases. This is contrasted by legato, song-like passages as well. Very often, sudden bursts of volume with strong chord accompaniment and speeding up of tempo may contrast with soft, sultry slow passages.

## Melody, key and structure

Tango is a genre which embodies passion and is also melancholy at the same time. The dance represents a battle between two men for the affections of a woman. The song lyrics thus often feature nostalgic and forlorn lyrics. Because of its melancholic nature, tango music is often dominated by minor keys; however, as contrast, major key passages may also slip into the music. To express intensity, the use of glissandi/portamenti passages is a characteristic of the melody. The *bandoneon* may also play highly elaborated melodic lines.

Tango music tends to have two, sometimes three primary sections. A tango *orquesta* or band may vary the order of the sections in performance. Often some sections are played more than once, e,g. although there may be only two distinct sections (A and B), the *orquesta* may play A-B-A-B-A. Or, if there are three sections, they may play A-B-A-C-A. When repeated, the sections are usually different from the first: there may be different instrumentation or accompaniment, or the melodic line may be varied by the *bandoneon*. Sometimes an introduction, bridge or coda may be added to the structure.

# Cuba

Cuba is one of the largest island nations in the Caribbean. Prior to its discovery by the Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus in 1492, various aboriginal groups inhabited the archipelago. Following the colonisation by Spain in 1511, Cuba's indigenous population was mostly wiped out as a result of diseases brought by the outsiders. Agriculture developed rapidly on this fertile island, and since the indigenous population was rapidly dwindling in number, a new source of labour was required and came in the form of slaves brought over from West Africa.

Several factors contributed to the particular way that Cuban music developed over the centuries. Spanish settlement was initially in the eastern side of the island and this was where the majority of the early slaves were taken. Farmers here were organised into smallholdings and needed only a small number of slaves. Following the revolution in Haiti in 1791, ex-slaves from Haiti also flocked to the eastern side of the island. The mix of African/European from various countries had an impact on musical styles and genres.

Another factor that influenced the development of Cuban music was the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1802. Problems in Haiti increased the demand for Cuban sugar so more slaves were needed to work on the sugar plantation. New influxes of African slaves came to Cuba right up to the abolition of slavery at the end of the nineteenth century. These slaves were given assumed identities (not necessarily accurate) at the arrival ports. This was to prevent possible organised slave revolt. They were kept in their assumed ethnic groups to avoid integration. The Spanish colonisers organised the slaves into 'self-help' organisations called *cabildos* intended to reduce tension between masters and slaves. In the *cabildos*, slaves were allowed to gather on holidays and to practise their own religion and music and dance. It was in these associations that the songs, dances and drum rhythm that were played for African deities were performed; music, culture and rituals were the mechanism by which slaves were able to keep alive their Africanness and resist Spanish culture. Following a failed rebellion by the African slaves in 1884, the Cuban government began to impose restrictions on *cabildos* and they began to decline by the end of the nineteenth century.

Today, the majority of Cuba's population is descended from the Spaniards and Africans; a small number of the population comprises people from France, China and other Caribbean islands (such as Haiti). Many now are also mixed race (mulatto). This multiracial mix of European/African and others contributed to the particular way that Cuban music has developed.

# Cuban *Son*

## 1 Background

Spanish settlers and visitors brought music from Spain. Military bands came over with the troops and played an important role in Cuban musical life. They brought musical instruments, including different types of plucked lutes and the guitar, and song and dance forms. At the same time, the slaves brought with them call and response singing, African drums and rhythms, and introduced instruments such as the musical earth bow and *marimbula* into Cuba.

Modern Cuban music and dance genres, though distinctive in their own ways, are the results of the mingling of European and African musical styles. Following the abolition of slavery in 1886, black Africans were forbidden to practise their religion by the Spanish government who forced them to become Roman Catholics. Outwardly, black Cubans appeared to practise Catholicism, but

secretly they paired each Catholic saint symbolically with their own *orisha*, or deity. The religion that developed as a result is called *Santeria* (the way of the Saints). For a long time, *Santeria* was a secret underground religion, but in recent times, it has gradually been allowed to come out into the open. Music, particularly the bata drum patterns practised in the *Santeria* rituals played a crucial role in the formation of Cuban music. The church was an important social context for music-making, as musical ensembles were organised around churches.

During the eighteenth century, opera companies came from Italy and Spain. They brought with them European music and dances. From there, public dances developed, with black and mulatto musicians providing the accompaniment for the dances at high-society balls and in dance halls. This led to interracial and intercultural cross-fertilisation, especially in the rhythm. Through this the contradanza criolla, also called contrandaza habanera in other Caribbean countries, was born and it led to later genres such as *danzón*, mambo and cha-cha-cha. During the nineteenth century and up to the 1920s, the *danzón* was the most popular national dance in Cuba; it was then replaced by a new musical style known as *son* which became the major genre of Cuban music in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Development of *son*

*Son* can be broadly defined as a vocal, instrumental and dance genre that is one of the most basic forms of popular Cuban music in which Spanish and African music influences can be found.

*Son* first developed in the eastern regions of the island (the 'Oriente') in the middle of the eighteenth century. The *changüí* and the *nengón* were the antecedents of the *son*. They comprised a fusion of plucked strings and African-derived percussion instruments. This came as a result of interaction between whites of Spanish descent who were the earliest settlers in this region and black slaves whose liberation in the nineteenth century led to a more intense mix than elsewhere on the island. Gradually, the *son* moved from rural areas to the suburban areas of Santiago de Cuba where it became *son montuno*, meaning *son* of the mountains. Some changes to the instrumentation and structure began to take place.

By 1910, the *son* had reached the Cuban capital of Havana on the western side of the island. A large population of freed slaves and soldiers, some from the east, were living in the slums of the city. Among them were musicians who played afro-cuban religious music, rumba and *son*. There in Havana, the *son* evolved further in terms of its instrumental format. The new form soon spread throughout the island and then abroad through short-wave radio and recordings, made and sold by US record companies. In the 1930s, radio stations played a huge part in disseminating the music, competing for audiences by providing regular live sessions. Cuban *son* bands began to tour Europe (mainly Spain) and the USA due to popular demand.

When it first arrived in Havana at the turn of the century, the *son* was the popular music of the working class. It was considered a lower-class type of music by the white, high society. As it became more popular, while the middle classes still shunned it, the upper classes held private parties for which *son* bands were hired. The popularisation of the genre eventually broke down barriers and a great number of urban *son* sextets and septets grew.

By the 1940s, a more elaborate formal structure and instrumentation had evolved to suit urban tastes. The traditional *son* septet expanded into a *conjunto* format. An important figure in this development was musician and bandleader Arsenio Rodríguez, who, with his strong Congolese roots, instigated many changes to the format of the *son* ensemble and re-Africanised the genre by incorporating conga drums and bringing Congolese words and religious symbolism into his songs. The 1950s gave rise to numerous *conjunto* and other dance bands in Cuba, and Cuban popular dance music spread to many other Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, USA and Europe. The Cuban revolution in 1959 brought a halt to popular dance music and isolated Cuba from the rest of the world.

## 2 Instruments

From the beginning, the Spanish conquerors brought with them different types of string instruments such as the harp, lutes and the guitar. Influenced by the guitar, the Cubans created the **tres** which became an essential melodic instrument in the *son*. The wooden body and neck of the Cuban instrument are strung with three groups of double steel strings; the two strings in each group or course are tuned as G (an octave apart), C (in unison), E (in unison) or as A, D, F sharp. It is plucked with a tortoise-shell plectrum.

Several types of bass instruments originating in the eastern region of Cuba were initially added to the instrumentation of the early *son* forms, but when the music moved to the urban areas and to the capital Havana, these bass instruments were eventually replaced by the Western double bass.

Some of the percussion instruments used in the *son* forms were also African-derived. The **bongo** consists of two small drums of different sizes to which the drumheads are attached with nails. The **guiro** (also known as *guayo*) possibly originated with the Bantu people of Africa. It is made from the cylindrical dried-out fruit of the gourd, between 30 and 50 centimetres long and about 10 centimetres wide. On the back of the instrument is a hole through which players can put their fingers (or just the thumb). The front surface has a number of equidistant parallel grooves that are 1 or 2 millimetres deep. A hard, thin stick is rubbed rapidly against these grooves across the ridge to produce a raspy sound. A pair of **maracas** is also typically used in *son*. It is a closed vessel made from the shell or skin of a fruit or wood, with seeds or other small substances inside, to which a wooden handle is attached. When shaken, the seeds make a rattling sound against the sides of the maracas.

A percussion instrument that very importantly defines the urban *son* is a pair of wooden sticks known as **claves** which are made from hard, sonorous wood and are about 15 centimetres in length. They are struck against each other to produce a basic rhythmic pattern, also known as clave.

In 1927, a single trumpet was also added to the band, making it septetos. Further changes to the *son* instrumentation were made in the 1940s by blind tres player and band leader Arsenio Rodríguez. A key development was the addition of the **conga** (or *tumbadora*), a drum with a barrel-shaped body made of staves fixed together by metal hoops, with a skin on one of its ends. Tuning keys are used to tune the drum. It is placed on a stand between the legs of the players and beaten with the hands. When played in a procession, it is hung from the player's shoulder by a strap. Rodríguez also added more trumpets to his band and included the piano in the ensemble. The piano in *son* is played quite differently from that found in European music; it is treated more like a percussion instrument, playing short repeated rhythmic patterns. Rodríguez's ensemble of bongo, conga, claves, three to four trumpets, tres, piano, double bass and singers became known as a *conjunto*.

# 3 Musical Features

## Rhythm

Cuban *son* is characterised by its unique and fundamental rhythm known as the **clave**, which is marked out by the *claves* (a pair of wooden sticks) themselves. It consists of a two-bar repeating pattern with three strokes in the first bar and two in the other, resulting in a 3-2 rhythmic pattern (sometimes also called a forward clave); if the bar with the 'two strokes' is played first, it becomes a 2-3 pattern, also known as reverse clave. An example of the basic 3-2 and 2-3 patterns are as follows:

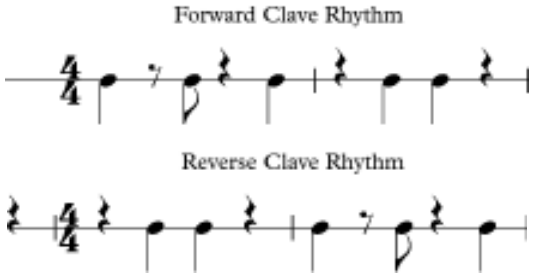


**Figure 3**

This basic clave pattern serves as the structural basis for the rhythm and melodies in *son* compositions. It derives from the West African notions of short, repeated rhythmic patterns.

The rhythm of the bongo drum is another important aspect of the *son* soundscape. The most basic form of its rhythmic pattern consists of constant quavers, with accented strokes on the smaller head of the drum on beats 1 and 3 of the 4/4 bar and on beat 4 of the larger drum head (see Figure 4). This bongo rhythmic pattern is known as the ***martillo*** ('hammer') pattern. In performance, however, bongo players often deviate from this basic pattern and improvise to fill in spaces between the melodic lines and to generate excitement. Bongo players may at times switch to playing the **cowbell** to emphasize the strong beats of the music.

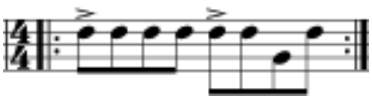

**Figure 4**

One of the unique rhythmic aspects of the *son* pattern is that played on the bass. The bass player performs something known as the '**anticipated bass**' rhythm. As the term implies, the notes sound slightly earlier than expected; this is because the bass plays on the quaver before beat 3 (i.e. 'and-of-two') and on beat four, which results in an interesting 'uneven' syncopation feel that repeats constantly (figure 5).

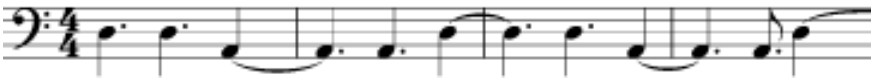

**Figure 5**

At the same time, the conga in the son ensemble accents beat 4 and 4½ which then locks in with the bongo and the bass line. The tres characteristically plays a short, rhythmic melody outlining or implying chords but not actually strumming them. The piano, too, plays much the same role as the tres: adding short repeated rhythmic patterns emphasising the last quaver of the fourth beat of the bar (i.e. beat 4½). All these complex interlocking rhythmic patterns and emphasis on the off-beats

are crucial for the 'feel' of the Cuban *son montuno*, and it is these complex rhythms that give the *conjunto*-style *son* its African characteristics. This 'Africanisation', or indeed 're-Africanisation', of the *son* is attributed to Arsenio Rodríguez.

## Structure, Texture, Harmony

Overall, the structure of *son* has two basic sections: *canto* and *montuno*. The *canto* is the song section at the beginning of the *son*. The verses are usually strophic and in a ten-line poetic form known as Décima. Within this section, there is no standard structure. It usually opens with an instrumental introduction followed by the verses alternating with instrumental interludes. The entire section may repeat with the same lyrical content. An instrumental passage then announces the next section: the *montuno*. This section has a formulaic structure within which the sub-sections are open in length to allow for vocal or instrumental improvisation, which is the essence of *son montuno*. In this section, call and response singing is a common feature; a lead vocalist (*sonero* or *pregon*) sings a short phrase and is answered by the chorus (*coro*). An extended instrumental solo, initially on tres or piano, was popularised by Arsenio Rodríguez. Instrumental solos, usually played by the trumpet, come after the call and response section. After several extended improvisations, a coda, which may be a repeat of the introduction, brings the piece to an end.

In *son*, the melody and harmony are usually quite simple. As rhythm is the important driving force of the music, melodic lines often correspond to the clave rhythmic pattern, with the melody in the bar with 'two strokes' of the clave pattern being more on the beat and that on the 'three strokes' being more syncopated. The chorus may sing in unison or in parallel thirds or sixths, and the harmonic progression of tonic, subdominant, dominant is often used.