

2 | Race and Transculturation

Cuban *Son*

ROBIN MOORE

The premise of this essay is that an examination of the Cuban *son* provides important insights into Cuban history and society, into Caribbean race relations, and ongoing processes of cultural fusion involving Afro-descendant and Euro-descendant practices, among others. The process of cultural adaptation and transformation through the years in the Caribbean has been described by Fernando Ortiz as transculturation, a term discussed in this chapter with respect to its utility in understanding musical development. The essay focusses primarily on early *son* history, its antecedent forms, the African-influenced aesthetic sense that gave rise to it, and the popularisation of the music and dance in the early twentieth century. It also briefly considers changes to *son* music in the 1930s and beyond. I view *son* of the early twentieth century as a cultural bridge in the sense that it helped to negotiate the aesthetic and socio-cultural divide that existed between Afro-descendant and Euro-descendant practices and laid the foundation for a more holistic and integrated national culture. In this sense, the history of Cuban *son* is tied to that of many other regional dance music forms (Dominican *merengue*, Puerto Rican *plena*, Trinidadian steel pan, etc.) that have contributed in similar ways to projects of nation-building. The broad appeal of such music results in its frequent linkages to political initiatives (Puri 2004), especially those involving integrationism. The essay begins with a discussion of Caribbean music, race, and hybridity, then continues with an overview of the emergence of *son* in the late nineteenth century out of drumming, song, and dance traditions associated with the Black community. Finally, it considers the music's early commercial form and broader significance.

Black Musical Traditions of the New World

The Caribbean affords an especially interesting space for thinking about Black diasporic musical relationships and influences. It is a region that became home to at least four million displaced Africans during the course of the Atlantic slave trade. Its residents today are primarily of African or mixed-African descent and perform countless forms of music, many

demonstrating prominent African-derived characteristics and/or linkages with other Afro-diasporic musical forms from the region and beyond. Thus, numerous examples exist of traditions that tie the Caribbean to Africa musically, linguistically, or ideologically, that define sectors of the Afro-Caribbean population as distinct from others, and that create affinities with broader notions of Blackness. On the other hand, the Caribbean is also known for fundamentally creolised or hybridised expression, and in many instances European influences predominate over African influences within such repertoire. Afro-Caribbean residents do not necessarily identify as a unified group or recognise the Afro-diasporic aesthetic ties their expressive traditions may have. In addition, some forms of music developed by Afro-Caribbean communities (such as the *danzón* and the Latin American bolero) are no longer associated with Black populations at all or are now performed primarily by non-Black populations. Clearly, notions of racialised expression in the region are fluid and emergent.

The diversity of cultural influences in the Caribbean thus make any attempt to speak of 'pure' heritage highly problematic. Divided into distinct zones of colonial expansion represented by Dutch-, English-, French-, and Spanish-speaking culture areas as well as influences from a diversity of African ethnic groups (from present-day Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Angola, Congo, and elsewhere), and permeated now by global media, the region, as outlined in the introduction, is perhaps best conceived as a jumble of cultural fragments. In such a context, it is difficult to maintain essentialist discourses of 'Black' and 'White' culture as perpetuated in the United States and elsewhere. One insight the Caribbean may have to offer first-world scholars of music is that discourses of sharing, commonality, and hybridity should play a more central role in scholarship on 'Black' heritage in the future (see also Radano 2003). Black heritage in the Americas is perhaps best viewed as an 'in-between' culture, the result of 'a webbed network, between the local and the global' (Gilroy 1993, 23), as 'polyrhythmic' in a metaphorical sense (Benítez-Rojo 1996, 18), and no longer associated exclusively with Black structures of feeling, performing, or producing. Yet Black communities may still perceive or perform such music in distinct ways.

Fernando Ortiz coined the term *transculturation* as a way of alluding to the complex ongoing social and cultural interactions associated with Caribbean heritage. To him, the term referenced various processes simultaneously: the loss or decline of certain cultural forms over time (especially those of socially marginal or dominated groups), the adoption of the cultural practices of other groups, the emergence of entirely new

forms of expression through the interpenetration of cultures, the movement of cultural practices between social classes, racial groups, or distinct social contexts (e.g., sacred to secular) within the same cultural group, and so on (Ortiz 1995, 102–3; Iznaga 1989, 79–80). The most important aspect of Ortiz's paradigm from the perspective of present-day academics is that it implicitly rejects notions of racial or ethnic purity, suggesting instead that the meanings and perceptions of culture are dialogic. That is, racialised culture has no unchanging 'essence'; it exists in a changing relationship to other forms and is perceived differently according to the exigencies of particular historical periods (Palmié 2013, 97).

One deficiency of the transculturation model is that it does not necessarily underscore the power imbalances and brutal oppression that have often accompanied cultural exchange in the region. Creolised cultures in much of the New World emerged following the mass slaughter of the Indigenous population, for instance, the creation of hierarchical societies based on slave labour, and ongoing forms of racialised oppression. Musical genres such as the *son* that eventually became emblematic of national heritage developed on the margins of society and were initially viewed by elites as violating social norms, transgressing established racial divides, and thus as a moral affront (Chasteen 2004). Their eventual acceptance as national heritage thus represents a profound conceptual transformation. The *son* can be understood from multiple perspectives: to the dominant classes it is often viewed as fun-loving party music with relatively subtle African-influenced elements that can be overlooked or downplayed when convenient. By contrast, to Black communities it frequently serves as a means of consciously perpetuating Afro-diasporic practices, of subverting established cultural norms, and of openly communicating coded messages to those versed in African-derived religions and related beliefs. Such messages involve musical and lyrical cues, as Ivor Miller has demonstrated in his study of early *son* recordings (Miller 2000, 10; see also Moore 1997, 93–4; Moore 2006, 125–6), as well as others.

The Emergence of the Cuban *Son*

The development of New World cultural practices derives ultimately from colonial enterprises involving the use of massive amounts of slave labour on plantations. Sugar, coffee, and tobacco were among the first products cultivated in the New World, and their production (especially sugar) was

especially lucrative because of slavery. Plantation economies generated tremendous wealth both in the colonies and in Europe. Benítez-Rojo (1996, 5) suggests that such revenue accelerated the industrial revolution and supported other economic endeavours across the Atlantic. In Cuba, roughly 800,000 slaves were brought in to support plantation economies prior to 1820, with another 800,000 arriving between 1820 and 1860 (Murray 1971, 149). For most of the nineteenth century, especially, the Cuban population was majority African. Despite the horrendous work conditions slaves endured and their typically short life spans, they nevertheless developed unique cultural forms (religious and secular) that continue to influence music and dance expression to this day.

Afro-diasporic heritage began to influence the local popular cultures of the Americas as early as the sixteenth century (e.g., Carpentier 1946, 40 ff.) through rhythmic and choreographic contributions to dance music forms such as the *zarabanda*, *chuchumbé*, and the *xácará* (the latter as of the eighteenth century).¹ These forms of expression, typically performed on European-derived instruments such as guitars but with some percussive accompaniment, fused elements of European popular song and dance traditions with rhythmic cells or other elements originating in Africa, Indigenous communities, or the Arab world. The genres frequently developed along trade routes and along transnational circuits rather than in single locations and became widespread in Spain and the New World at roughly the same time. By the mid-nineteenth century, free Black Cuban performers familiar with Western musical instruments (many of them trained in segregated military battalions) began to influence popular music and dance traditions in new ways by creolizing or ‘ragging’ popular European-derived dance forms such as the *contradanza* and *danza*, and by developing related forms such as the *danzón* (Madrid & Moore 2013). Lyrical references to Black heritage also featured prominently in the *guaracha*, a bawdy song form popularised through Cuba’s Blackface theatre, especially as of the 1860s (Linares Savio 1999). Influenced musically by *xácaras* and related forms, *guaracha* lyrics (typically written by White Cuban men) often discussed the sensual appeal of Black women, or the threat presented by Black street thugs (*negros curros* or *negros cheches*). While the *guaracha* does often incorporate 3–2 rhythmic ambivalence (*sesquiáltera*) and other elements arguably linked to the African diaspora, its structure, style, and lyrics are largely European-derived, and its Afro-diasporic elements relatively subdued. The same can be

¹ See Thomas 2012, 65–9, for discussion of musical elements associated with the *xácará*, and a summary of what is known of such colonial-era dance repertoire.

said of the *xácara* and the other dance music genres mentioned earlier. By contrast, the forms of drumming, song, and dance most closely associated with the slave population (the music and dance of Afro-diasporic religious worship, and secular forms of drumming/dance/song) were not accepted by dominant society prior to the twentieth century. Their most overt influence on mainstream culture as of the late nineteenth century resulted from the ways their structure, instrumentation, and aesthetics influenced the development of the *son*.

Rumba is the most popular style of secular dance music to emerge from the Afro-Cuban community in the decades prior to the popularisation of the *son*, and it strongly influenced later dance traditions. Rumba is an umbrella term for a group of related styles with roots in rural slave practices. Some authors suggest that it developed out of Kongo-influenced forms such as *makuta*² and *yuka*³ drumming (Daniel 1995); others suggest possible roots in Ganga⁴ culture (Ortiz 1981, 427). The genre first emerged as early as the 1850s (Daniel 1995, 17) but only became widely popular during the period of abolition (1886) and its aftermath. Blacks in rural areas performed rumba in the 1880s and 1890s as a form of after-work entertainment, for instance (Barnet 1994, 64). Rumba music features voice and percussion only and is closely associated with the Black working classes. The years following abolition witnessed the rapid urbanisation of the country, with former slaves moving to cities in search of better work and educational opportunities. Poorer neighbourhoods in Havana and Matanzas expanded exponentially in population as a result. Few Blacks could read at the time, and many had no formal education, but they became an increasing urban cultural presence (Sublette 2004, 256).

Rumba instrumentation varies but at the turn of the twentieth century it typically included three conga drums (often referred to in descending order of size as the *caja*, *tumbadora*, and *quinto*), a pair of wooden claves, and a longer pair of wooden sticks (*palitos*). As in the case of many Afro-descendant traditions, most instruments in the ensemble play relatively repetitive patterns that support the ostinato or groove, while certain lead

² A form of religious drumming and dance associated with Kongo traditions, and especially in Afro-Cuban *cabildos* of the nineteenth century. Single-headed, cylindrical *makuta* drums are played in pairs. They are believed to be an antecedent of the modern conga drum.

³ A secular music and dance tradition involving performance on three drums (*caja*, *mula*, and *cachimbo*) and a bell or hoe blade. Single-headed *yuka* drums are long and tall, made of hollowed tree trunks. See Moore (2010, 57).

⁴ According to Basso Ortiz (2001, 196), the Gangás are known in Africa as the Kono and live in present-day Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The Cuban term may derive from the river Gbangbá in Sierra Leone.

instruments (in this case the high *quinto* drum and sometimes other drums) improvise against it. In earlier Afro-descendant musical traditions including *yuka* and *makuta* drumming, and in musical performances that accompany Afro-descendant religious traditions, the lowest drum or percussion instrument typically improvises. Rumba's emphasis on the highest-pitched drum as the soloist thus represents a deviation from established practice (Sublette 2004, 266). The claves passed directly from rumba to *son* ensembles in Western cities, with only a small modification to their repeated rhythmic pattern (see Moore 2012, 191–2 for a transcription of rumba clave, and p. 202 for a transcription of *son* clave). The *cáscara* or shell patterns performed on a woodblock or the side of a drum by the *palitos* have influenced *son* music strongly since the 1940s and 1950s with the incorporation of the *timbales* into ensembles, given their use of the similar rhythms and techniques. The tendency for *timbaleros* to alternate *cáscara* performance on the shell of the drum as well as on the head represents a creolising or 'Africanisation' of European drumming practices.⁵

While sounding decidedly Afro-diasporic to the casual listener, rumba has been influenced by European heritage and thus represents a transculturated cultural form in its own right. Rolando Pérez Fernández (1988) has documented what he describes as a gradual 'binarization' of African-influenced repertoire in Cuba, by which he means a shift from music performed in compound triple meter (such as older devotional drumming) to duple meter (such as rumba). To Pérez Fernández, this in itself suggests accommodation on the part of the Black community to the aesthetics of European-derived popular song. Rumba lyrics are typically written in Spanish, of course, and the poetic forms employed such as the *décima* and *copla* derive from Spain as well (Pasmanick 1997). Rumba melodies increasingly employ European-style major and minor scales, though five- and six-note scales more typical of traditional African melodies are also found. Vocal harmonies tend to imply simple European-derived chord progressions. Perhaps most importantly, the formal structure of rumba clearly demonstrates the fusion of African- and European-derived heritage. The two primary sections of the music consist of (1) a strophic song or verse, influenced by European-derived practices, often in binary form; and (2) an open-ended, improvised, cyclic *montuno* section with antiphonal vocals that corresponds much more closely to the formal structure of traditional sub-Saharan African musics. Rumba's

⁵ See Ortiz (1952) for a fascinating account of how Middle Eastern *atabales* came to be adopted into the Spanish military during the Crusades, and how Black Cuban performers further modified their performance practice in the nineteenth century, which became central to the development of the modern *timbales*.

two-part structure is essentially identical to that of the *son*, and it seems to have strongly influenced its development in that sense.

In considering the *son*'s relationship to other Afro-descendant musical practices, it is useful to consider the broader aesthetic characteristics of rumba, the sacred music of *Santería*, and related forms (see also Moore 2010, 80–1). Such repertoire typically manifests considerable 'rhythmic density', with multiple rhythmic ideas performed simultaneously. The music tends to be organised around the use of ostinatos, with multiple short phrases contributing in various ways to a complex amalgam of sound. Compositions are cyclic and open-ended in terms of form, and are played continuously as long as needed to satisfy the demands of the moment. Ensembles (as in the case of rumba) adopt a hierarchy of sorts in which most instruments play unchanging, repeated patterns while a select few improvise or vary their parts against the others. This allows for broad musical participation, with the less experienced performing static, repetitive parts. Call–response singing between a lead singer and chorus is very common in such repertoire. Timbral contrast is a central means creating musical interest, with the sounds' diverse un- or semi-pitched objects made of metal, wood, plant matter, and animal skin sounding against vocal lines (Ortiz 1981, 134). All of these elements have influenced the sound and style of Cuban *son*, despite its incorporation of additional instruments, harmonies, and other influences from Europe and elsewhere.

Son and Transculturation

Son music and dance have been widely influential since the earliest years of its recording and mass dissemination. An iconic form of national expression by the late 1920s, *son* might be described as the Cuban equivalent of blues or R&B music in the United States in terms of its impact on subsequent generations of performers. While *son* performers were originally persecuted by police and local authorities, especially in western Cuba (Moore 1997, 95–7), its acceptance by dominant society marked a shift in terms of greater tolerance for Black and working-class expression. It became a revitalizing force, transforming genres such as the *danzón* fundamentally as well as others that emerged later such as the *chachachá*, *mambo*, even protest song (Acosta 1983, 34). I argue that, as opposed to genres that preceded it, *son* music is the first commercially successful genre to incorporate a majority of the Afro-diasporic aesthetic elements described earlier, presenting them in a manner less threatening to Eurocentric middle-class listeners than music based on percussion and

vocals alone. The *son* represents a cultural bridge of sorts between Afro-diasporic and European musical practices, perpetuating traditional styles of Black performance on new instruments and by means of new ensembles more acceptable to dominant society.

Numerous variants of the *son* exist, but most scholars agree that it first developed in eastern Cuba in the rural areas surrounding cities such as Bayamo, Holguín, Las Tunas, and Santiago. Danilo Orozco conducted fieldwork in these regions in the 1980s and recorded members of the Miranda family, among others, with a long history of performing such repertoire. Orozco suggests that the origins of the style date back at least to the 1860s, and that in its early form it consisted essentially of short, repeated melodic lines performed on local string instruments such as the *tres* to the accompaniment of a small drum or other percussion and vocals, often singing a repeated refrain. A transcription of a representative segment of Orozco's LP *Antología del son* (1987) indicates that early *tres* melodic patterns tended to outline simple harmonic progressions such as V-I. Some of the *tres* melodies appear to have been 'claved', as is true of more recent *son* music (i.e., comprised of two phrases, one of which is slightly less syncopated than the other and thus corresponds to the less syncopated '2' side of *son* clave, the other slightly more syncopated and aligned with the '3' side; see Moore 2010, 93–4), even though particular variants (such as *changüí* repertoire from the Guantánamo region) were not. A transcription of the *tres* ostinato found in Orozco's recording 'Nengón' appears in Figure 2.1; it may have been conceived of as claved, although the rhythmic differences between the melody's two contrasting phrases are minimal.⁶ Experiments among early *soneros* that fused cyclic, ostinato-based performance with European vocal harmonies in eastern Cuba had a

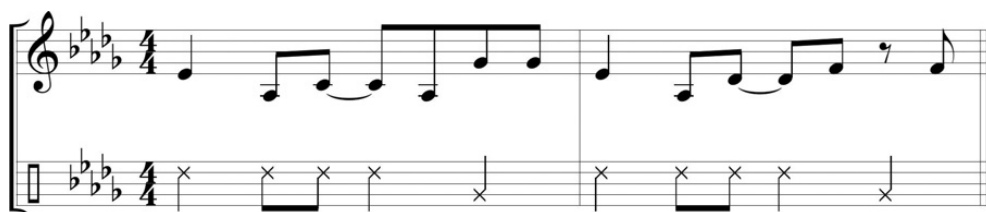


Figure 2.1 'Nengón' *tres* and bongo ostinato

⁶ The 'Nengón' recording has been re-released on the CD *¡Ahora Sí! Here Comes Changüí* (Corason 1995) and is now available for download through Amazon.com and other services.

corollary of sorts at approximately the same time in western cities as well, where traditional rumba and *coros de guaguancó* featured European-influenced vocals and harmonies accompanied by percussive instrumentation (Moore 1997, 92). However, the use of a claved melodic instrument represented an innovation unique to *son*. It remains unclear whether this aspect of the music developed in the eastern region or only became common practice after it was popularised in western provinces.

The few interviews undertaken with early *son* performers support Orozco's assertion that *son* music at the turn of the twentieth century consisted of little more than a short-looped refrain, similar to 'Nengón'. Miguel Matamoros (1894–1971), for instance, recalled listening to *soneros* in Santiago in 1905 as a child and fashioning homemade bongo drums out of olive barrels in order to imitate them (Matamoros in Muguercia 1985, 59). He sat outside Black social clubs such as La Chispa de Oro (The Golden Spark) and watched early *son* bands that played music based on repeated choruses. These groups typically expanded their instrumentation to include multiple string instruments, percussion including maracas or clave, and a bass instrument such as *botija* (ceramic jug) or *marimbula* (a large African-derived *mbira* or thumb piano) performing an off-beat pattern known as anticipated bass (see Moore 2010, 96). The choruses *son* bands performed included phrases such as '*La pisé, la pisé, la pisé mamá/Con el pie, con el pie, con el pie, na' má*' (I stepped on it, stepped on it, stepped on it, honey/With my foot, with my foot, with my foot, nothing more). Matamoros' recollections underscore the fact that those performing and listening to early *son* consisted overwhelmingly of poorer Cubans of colour, individuals employed in manual labour jobs (ironing and other domestic work, water-carrying for houses without plumbing, agricultural or factory labour, garbage collection, etc.) and frequently with little formal education. *Son* as it spread to cities in the early twentieth century tended thus to be associated with marginal neighbourhoods, and also with brothels (Muguercia 1985, 57–64). Elites rejected it for some time because of its humble origins, its associations with prostitution, and because many considered the use of percussion instruments played with the bare hands to be primitive, even atavistic (Moore 1997, 96).

The first generation of *soneros* to attain broader commercial success in the 1920s did so by combining the early *son*'s cyclic structure with a verse section influenced by popular songs of the day as found in traditional *trova* music or Latin American boleros. The writing of songs in verses or in four-line rhymed stanzas has no counterpart in traditional music from sub-Saharan Africa (Sublette 2004, 3345). Compositions like 'Son de la loma' (They're

from the Hills, or *Son* from the Hills), written by Miguel Matamoros in 1922, exemplify this new approach to composition.⁷ ‘The Hills’ (*la loma*) mentioned in the chorus refers to Santiago, and ‘the plains’ (*el llano*) to Havana, where Matamoros hoped to expand his audience. In addition to making *sones* more sophisticated in a formal sense by adding strophic verses and other pre-composed sections with relatively complex harmonies, the composer stylised his music in other ways. Matamoros popularised a trio-based version of the *son* featuring two guitars and maracas, thus distancing the sound from instruments of African origin such as the claves and bongo.⁸ He added an instrumental introduction prior to the verse, such as the sixteen-measure melody that begins ‘Son de la loma’. Both the introduction and verse repeat before the chorus begins, and both are heard again following a short instrumental solo. Matamoros’ emphasis on precomposed segments, his decision not to use much percussion, and a foregrounding instead of string instruments and vocal harmonies, undoubtedly contributed to the music’s early acceptance among elites. The changes resulted in a markedly ‘Europeanised’ version of the *son* on early 78 rpm records.

Similar stylistic experiments can be heard in pieces performed by larger sextets and septets in Havana at approximately the same time, such as Ignacio Piñero’s ‘Viva el bongó’ (recorded in 1928), performed by the Septeto Nacional.⁹ This composition also features an instrumental introduction with a melody performed by trumpeter Lázaro Herrera, followed by a verse section. Piñero’s recording differs in various ways, however, and its overall approach to the interpretation of the *son* gives a better feel for general trends in composition during the period. Percussion is foregrounded, with the clave and bongo prominent in the group’s overall sound. The bongo player improvises constantly even during the verse and incorporates multiple *bramidos* (a sound resulting from a friction slide of a finger across the drum head), implicitly referencing music heard in *Abakuá* and other Afro-Cuban sacred ritual.¹⁰ Perhaps most importantly, Piñero’s piece begins to accelerate beginning with the transition to the *montuno* at about 1:50. The clave sense switches orientation from 3–2 to 2–3 (a common practice in rumba), and the *tres* player begins

⁷ It can be streamed on YouTube; see for instance this link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfdwBDo2jqA (accessed 13 June 2017).

⁸ The Trío Matamoros appears to have been one of the first trios in all of Latin America, helping establish a paradigm that would become popular internationally in subsequent decades.

⁹ Available on *Ignacio Piñero and his Septeto Nacional* (Tumbao Cuban Classics CD TCD-019), 1992.

¹⁰ Two prominent moments this occurs are at 0:51 and 1:12. The *bramido* is most closely associated with the sacred Ekué Abakuá drum.



Figure 2.2 Claved *tres* pattern in 2–3 from the *montuno* of ‘Viva el bongó’

to play a varied ostinato pattern corresponding to it (Figure 2.2),¹¹ supporting the call–response vocals featuring lead singer Juan de la Cruz. The overall feel of the final section of the piece, nearly half of the three-minute recording, is syncopated and improvisational, with varied lead vocals, varied *tres* patterns, and constant *bongó* flourishes. The emphasis on the *montuno* in the song foregrounds its spontaneous, jam-like nature, far different from the style of most pre-composed European-style repertoire of the day. And the layering of vocal lines against the *tres* melody played by Francisco González presages future developments in *son* style, with horn arrangements of the 1940s and beyond creating short, repeated melodies performed simultaneously by multiple instrumentalists.

The early commercial *son* can be considered a transculturated musical form in various senses, a cultural bridge connecting African- and European-derived aesthetics. Some of the ways such fusion manifests itself have been discussed already, such as (1) the use of instruments derived from Afro-Cuban traditions (the bongo, clave, and maraca) alongside European-derived or -inspired string instruments (*tres* and guitar); and (2) the fusion of ‘linear’, pre-composed verse sections patterned after European popular song in tandem with open-ended, cyclic ‘jam’ sections more characteristic of traditional sub-Saharan African musical performance (see Locke 2009 for further discussion of the latter). Beyond instrumentation and form, other areas of cultural fusion include: (3) lyrics, written predominantly in Spanish but with the frequent inclusion of African-derived terms or phrases, such as *bilongo*, *mandinga*, *iyamba*, *makongo*, *chévere*, etc (Moore 1997, 94–5, 110; Miller 2000);¹² (4)

¹¹ The use of claved *tres* ostinati in the early twentieth century provided the inspiration for similar styles of performance on the piano in subsequent decades, as developed by Antonio María Romeu, Anselmo Sacasas, and others (Sublette 2004, 446; Madrid and Moore 2013, 58, 60).

¹² *Bilongo* is a local term for witchcraft, used famously in Guillermo Rodríguez Fiffe’s *son* composition of the same name from the 1920s. *Mandinga* is an African ethnic group; *iyamba* and *makongo* are ritual titles within Abakuá societies, and *chévere* is an Abakuá-derived term meaning good, positive, or cool.

choreography, as dancers perform *sones* in closed couples inspired by European-influenced society dances such as the waltz, *danza*, and *danzón*, yet incorporate much more hip and shoulder movement characteristic of African dance. *Son* couples often break apart and improvise steps separately in climactic sections (making the dance much more comparable to rumba performance); (5) the creation of vocal and instrumental melodies that correspond rhythmically to African-derived notions of clave or timeline, as in Figure 2.2 (see Garcia 2006, 44–5 for discussion of claved composition in Arsenio Rodríguez’s music a decade later). This practice essentially reconceives vocal or instrumental melodies, treating them as if they were a form of percussion and linking them directly to the overall rhythmic groove in the same way. The clave principle prioritises rhythmic relationships between instruments and voices in a manner entirely distinct from European musical practice.

The use of (6) interlocking riffs as an organisational principle in the creation of climactic moments in dance compositions and the layering of distinct melodies, textures, and timbres, represents an overt ‘Africanisation’ of dance music practice as well. The tendency is especially evident in *son*-influenced mambos of the 1940s and beyond that layer trumpets, trombones, and saxophone melodies against one another on top of a rhythm section vamp, as for instance in the music of Benny Moré’s ‘*banda gigante*’ (Moore 2006, 44–51). It is also found in the recordings of Arsenio Rodríguez’s ensembles, specifically his *diablo* horn interludes, often performed as an accompaniment to improvised solos (Garcia 2006, 50–1). Similar practices can be found even earlier in the *guajeos* of *son*-influenced *danzónes* (Madrid and Moore 2013, 66–9). Fernando Ortiz (1981, 140) describes the layered melodic riffs associated with the mambo in the following way: ‘[the mambo] is nothing but an interpenetration of melodic lines. They are harmonised in a weave, composed spontaneously by means of certain rhythms, individually executed by each musician, but with all strands crisscrossed and tied together in the same fabric’.¹³ The *guajeo*, the *diablo* interlude, and mambo (all variants of the same idea) collectively served as models for *moña* horn interludes associated with salsa repertoire of the 1960s and beyond.

One might arguably add a final transculturative element to the list associated with *sones* (and other Afro-Cuban music), one related to Miller’s notion of double performance: (7) the tendency to incorporate

¹³ ‘... todo no es sino trabazón de líneas sonoras armonizadas en un tejido compuesto con espontaneidad por sendos ritmos, individualmente ejecutados a su antojo por cada músico, pero cruzadas y enlazadas todas sus hebras entre sí en una misma urdimbre’.

coded meanings of various sorts into lyrical or instrumental content. Perhaps because Afro-Cuban culture has roots in religious music and dance that suffered centuries of persecution, or perhaps simply as a means of keeping the meanings of Black culture more exclusive to the Black community itself, performers have long adopted metaphorical or otherwise obscure phrases in their lyrics whose meanings are often apparent only to local audiences. Early *sones* of the late nineteenth century often used coded language to obscure the meaning of the text, which might refer to the Wars of Independence against Spain (Muguercia 1985, 51), racial violence surrounding the uprising of the Independent Party of Color in June 1912 (Sublette 2004, 318), or any number of other topics. The many Afro-Cuban ritual or slang terms incorporated by composers served a similar purpose. The same can be said of *bramidós* on the bongo, or of rhythmic phrases on percussion instruments that only practitioners of Afro-diasporic religions would associate with sacred contexts (Moore 2006, 126). A tendency to use dance music as a means of conveying coded messaging continues into more recent times, with the dance repertoire of the 1990s such as the Charanga Habanera's 'Mango Verde' implicitly likening Fidel Castro to a green mango because of the green fatigues he often wore; the lead singer asks when it/he might finally be ripe enough to 'fall from the tree'.¹⁴

Conclusion

Cuban *son* performance has changed in many respects through the years, though its fundamental stylistic elements coalesced as of the 1930s. This decade witnessed the popularisation of the *danzón de nuevo ritmo*, a shortened version of the *danzón* with emphasis on a final, cyclic improvisatory section derived from the *son's montuno*. The 1940s saw the rise of the mambo and *cha cha chá*, as mentioned, both strongly influenced by *sones*; of Latin jazz that blended elements of *son* with big-band harmonies and instrumentation, as well as incorporating *cáscara* patterns from rumba *guaguancó* in some cases;¹⁵ and the *conjunto* tradition of *son* performance characterised by extended horn sections and the introduction of the conga

¹⁴ See for instance discussion of the song in Miami's Nuevo Herald: <http://www.cubanet.org/htdocs/CNews/y01/ago01/20o1.htm> (accessed 16 June 2017). Various individuals living in Cuba in the 1990s confirmed to me that this was a common interpretation of song's meaning.

¹⁵ According to Andy Gonzalez (public lecture, 8 January 2002), percussionists in Latin jazz ensembles such as the Casino de la Playa and the Julio Cuebas Orchestra were the first to

drum and piano into the ensemble. By the 1950s, groups such as the Sonora Matancera, Machito and his Afro-Cubans, and the orchestras of Tito Rodríguez and Tito Puente (the latter three in New York) had adopted the timbales as well, creating the basis for the emergent *son*-based salsa sound of the 1960s and beyond.¹⁶ In Havana, the 1970s and 1980s gave rise to various experiments that fused the *son* with elements of rock, funk, jazz, and local Afro-Cuban drumming as heard in early hits by Irakere ('Aguanile' and 'Por romper el coco'), Los Van Van's *songo* genre, and the emergence of *timba* music as championed by NG La Banda, La Charanga Habanera, and others (Moore 2006, 123 ff.; Perna 2006). Despite the many variants of the *son* style and countless minor modifications to its standard rhythmic patterns, piano style, bass phrasing, and so on, the overall concept of claved accompaniment on a melodic instrument (piano, *tres*, etc.) in tandem with an anticipated bass pattern has remained constant, as has the contrast between a verse and *montuno* and the use of syncopated rhythmic ostinati. Accompanying dance moves, also subject to regional and generational variation (salsa 'on 1' or 'on 2', *rueda de casino* choreographies, etc.), have nevertheless remained relatively constant through the years as well.

The phenomenal popularity of the *son* for nearly a century within Cuba does make one wonder why the population has chosen to structure their musical experience through it for so long. While the question may never be fully resolved, I argue that much of its popularity derives from its hybrid aesthetics that fuse Afro- and Euro-descendant practices, and from its adaptability. Consciously or unconsciously, Cubans have come to identify with cultural forms such as the *son* that can accommodate European-derived instruments, scales, texts, harmonies, formal structures, and choreographic influences, but that also allow for improvisation, spontaneity, cyclic and open-ended performance, as well as the incorporation of rhythmic and other organisational principles (*clave*, the use of layered ostinati, call-response singing, etc.) derived from West African sources. This sort of expression effectively represents local sensibilities, though it can manifest itself in markedly different ways according to the demands of

experiment with the incorporation of rumba-style *casaca* patterns as an accompaniment to social dance music.

¹⁶ Sublette (2004, 473, 479) notes that Arsenio Rodríguez's band was the first to incorporate the conga drums in 1942, thus foregrounding influences from rumba, and Machito's (aka Francisco Grillo) was the first to use timbales, congas, and bongo in tandem as of 1944. According to Andy Gonzalez (public lecture, 8 January 2002), Umbaldo Nieto, the *timbalero* with Machito for many years, invented what is now the standard bell pattern played on the timbales in hotter sections of salsa repertoire.

the moment. Performers may choose to deemphasise African heritage in their compositions, as in the case of Miguel Matamoros, or foreground Afro-descendant heritage and themes prominently as in the music of Ignacio Piñero, Arsenio Rodríguez, or NG La Banda. *Son* can thus be performed so as to represent particular ethnic segments of the population (especially those involved in more overtly Afro-diasporic styles of music and dance), or to appeal broadly to a diverse listener base.

Returning to the concept of transculturation, I believe that certain aspects of the paradigm are quite helpful when reflecting on the history of Cuban *son*, especially its rejection of racial purity and its emphasis on constant adaptation and transformation. Ortiz's concept may also be used productively to analyse particular aspects of change associated with the music, such as the gradual incorporation of conga drums from Afro-Cuban rumba and street carnival bands into *danzónes*, conjunto-style *son*, and later salsa music. Yet the term as initially conceived is also decidedly apolitical and fails to draw the analyst's attention to the human agency involved in musical development, the motivations for it, and its broader significance. This is a potential flaw affecting all literature focussing on change as a category in the abstract. *Son* must ultimately be understood as an invention of Afro-descendant peoples, a manifestation of their desire to foreground their unique heritage and experience, and to see it accepted by others. In the face of post-colonial policies of 'abstract inclusion and concrete exclusion' (Martín-Barbero in García Canclini 1995, 147) – that is, a discursive acceptance of racial diversity combined with the social and economic marginalisation of people of colour in practical terms – musical forms such as *son* represent both a reformulation and a challenge to the existing order. They may be read merely as a manifestation of localness (*cubanidad*), as everyone's music. But to practitioners versed in local Afro-diasporic heritage they also represent a form of *marronage* (Quintero Rivera 1994), the subversion of European-derived forms by means of their infusion with new perspectives, cultural codes, and aesthetic frames of understanding.

References

- Acosta, Leonardo. 1983. *Del tambor al sintetizador*. Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas.
- Barnet, Miguel. 1994. *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, trans. W. Nick Hill. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press.

- Basso Ortiz, Alessandra. 2001. 'Los gangá longobá: El nacimiento de los dioses'. *Boletín Antropológico*. Año 20, 2, no. 52 (May–August), 195–208.
- Benítez-Rojo, Antonio. 1996. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Carpentier, Alejo. 1946. *La música en Cuba*. Mexico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Chasteen, John Charles. 2004. *National Rhythms, African Roots. The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Daniel, Yvonne P. 1995. *Rumba. Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- García, David. 2006. *Arsenio Rodríguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- García Canclini, Néstor. 1995. *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 1992. 'What is "Black" in Black Popular Culture?' In Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, 21–33.
- Iznaga, Diana. 1989. *Transculturación en Fernando Ortiz*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
- Linares Savio, María Teresa. 1999. 'La guaracha cubana, imagen del humor criollo'. *Catauro. Revista cubana de antropología*. Año 1, no. 0 (July–December), 94–104.
- Locke, David. 2009. 'Africa/Ewe, Dagbamba, Shona, BaAka'. In Jeff Todd Titon, ed., *Worlds of Music*, shorter vers., 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Schirmer Centage Learning, 67–103.
- Madrid, Alejandro and Robin Moore. 2013. *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Ivor. 2000. 'A Secret Society Goes Public: The Relationship Between Abakuá and Cuban Popular Culture'. *African Studies Review*. 43, no. 1 (April), 161–88.
- Moore, Robin. 1997. *Nationalizing Blackness. Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Moore, Robin. 2006. *Music and Revolution. Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Moore, Robin. 2010. *Music in the Hispanic Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, Robin, ed. 2012. *Musics of Latin America*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Muguercia, Alberto. 1985. *Algo de la trova en Santiago*. Havana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí.
- Murray, D. R. 1971. 'Statistics of the Slave Trade to Cuba, 1790–1867'. *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 3, no. 2, 131–49.

- Noble, Patrick Thomas. 2001. 'Timba'. Harvard College Undergraduate Thesis, Department of Folklore and Mythology.
- Orozco, Danilo, comp. 1987. *Antología integral del son. Volumen 1, Bases Históricas*. LD-286 and 287. Santiago de Cuba: Siboney Records.
- Ortiz, Fernando. 1952. 'La transculturación blanca de los tambores de los negros'. *Archivos venezolanos del folklore*. Año 1, no. 2 (July–December), 235–65.
- Ortiz, Fernando. 1981. *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*, 2nd ed. Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas.
- Ortiz, Fernando. 1995. *Cuban Counterpoint, Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Palmié, Stephan. 2013. *The Cooking of History. How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Perna, Vincenzo. 2005. *Timba: The Sound of Cuban Crisis*. London: Ashgate.
- Puri, Shalini. 2004. *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Quintero Rivera, Ángel. 1994. 'The Camouflaged Drum: Melodization of Rhythms and Maroonage Ethnicity in Caribbean Peasant Music'. In Gerard H. Béhague, ed., *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*. Miami: North-South Center, 47–64.
- Pasmanick, Phillip. 1997. "'Decima" and "rumba": Iberian Formalism in the Heart of Afro-Cuban Song.' *Latin American Music Review*. 18, no. 2 (Autumn–Winter), 252–77.
- Pérez Fernández, Rolando Antonio. 1988. *La binarización de los ritmos ternarios africanos en América Latina*. Havana: Casa de las Américas.
- Radano, Ronald. 2003. *Lying Up a Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sublette, Ned. 2004. *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.
- Sublette, Ned. 2007. *Cuba and Its Music. From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Thomas, Susan. 2012. 'Music, Conquest, and Colonialism'. In Robin Moore, ed., *Musics of Latin America*. New York: W.W. Norton, 24–75.

Discography

Afro-Cuban/Afrodiasporic Religious and Folkloric Repertoire

- Alén Rodríguez, Olavo et al., comps. 1997. *Sacred Rhythms of Cuban Santería*. Smithsonian Folkways CD 40419. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute.
- Cabrera, Lydia, and Josefina Tarafa, comps. 2003. *Havana and Matanzas. Cuba ca. 1957: Batá, Bembé, and Palo Songs*. Smithsonian Folkways CD SFW 40434. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute.
- Faarquharson, Mary et al., comps. 1992. *Africa in America. Music from 19 Countries*. Corasón CD set MTCD 1157. Mexico City: Música Tradicional.

Oestreicher, Christian, et al., comps. 1997. *Cuba Afroamérica. Chants et rythmes afrocaribains*. VDE Records CD 959. Geneva, Switzerland: Archives Internationales de Musique Populaire.

Rumba

Grauer, Bill, comp. 2003. *Festival in Havana. A Musical Time Capsule of Havana Before the Revolution*. Milestone MCD 9337–2. Berkeley, CA: Milestone Records.

Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. 1992. *Rumba caliente 88/77*. Qbadisc CD QB 9005. New York: Qbadisc Inc.

Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. 1994. *Congo yambumba*. Qbadisc CD QB 9014. New York: Qbadisc Inc.

Totico y sus Rumberos. 1992. *Totico y sus Rumberos*. Montuno CD MCD 515. New York: Loumo Music, Inc.

Early Son

Oramas, Faustino. 1995. *El Guayabero*. EGREM CD 1062. Havana: EGREM.

Orozco, Danilo, comp. 1987. *Antología integral del son. Volumen 1, Bases Históricas*. LD-286 and 287. Santiago de Cuba: Siboney Records. See also the CD *¡Ahora Sí! Here Comes Changüí* (Corason, 1995), which includes many of the same recordings.

Septeto Nacional, El. 1992. *Ignacio Piñero and His Septeto Nacional*. Tumbao Cuban Classics TCD-019. Switzerland: Camarillo Music Ltd.

Strachwitz, Chris, and Michael Avalos, comps. 1991. *Sextetos Cubanos Vol. 1*. Arhoolie Folklyric CD 7003. El Cerrito, CA: Arhoolie Records, Inc.

Later Son: 1940s and Beyond

Conjunto Chappottín. 1991. *Conjunto Chappottín*. Artex CD 051. Havana: EGREM.

Dratch, Howard et al. 1990. *A Carnival of Cuban Music. Routes of Rhythm Volume 1*. Rounder CD 5049. Cambridge, MA: Cultural Research Communications, Inc.

La Sonora Matanzera. 1998. *La Sonora Matancera con Celia Cruz*. Latinos Hot Rhythms CD LM 82064. London: Rise International Music Ltd.

Moré, Beny. 2003. *Beny More the King of Son*. BMG CD 74321 98764–2. New York: BMG Entertainment.

Pozo, Chano, and Arsenio Rodríguez. 1992. *Legendary Sessions: Chano Pozo and Arsenio Rodríguez with Machito and His Orchestra*. Tumbao Cuban Classics TCD-017. Switzerland: Camarillo Music Ltd.

Ramírez de Arellano, Enrique, comp. 1990. *Septetos cubanos. Sones de Cuba*. Corasón CD set MTCD 113–114. Mexico City: Música Tradicional.