

Basics of Latin Percussion

by Lalo Davila

With Latin Percussion becoming increasingly popular in various idioms, so has the interest in learning how to perform these instruments. Although these instruments are classified as "Latin Percussion" their applications are endless. Their uses are applied to such styles as Rock, Jazz, Pop, Salsa, etc.

As a young player, one must concentrate on achieving good quality of sound as well as consistence of sound of each instrument. Below are a few suggestions on how to get started with learning Latin Percussion. Refer to the following pages for playing examples.

- I. Understand the role of clave.
 - A. practice all forms of clave
 - B. play the clave with some Latin recordings
 - C. play along with others

- II. Start on one conga first.
 - A. Work on your sounds
 1. open tone
 2. dead stroke
 3. heal-tip technique
 4. close slap (be patient)
 5. open slap
 - B. Take your time with each sound
 1. be consistent
 2. play basic pattern first
 3. play with others
 4. play with recordings
 - C. Go to two drums when ready

- III. Start on bongo when ready
 - A. Work on similar sounds as the conga.
 - B. Work on a consistent martillo pattern.
 - C. Play along with others.

IV. Timbales

- A. Choose between 12" & 13" or 14" & 15" combinations depending on situation.
- B. Work on various sounds.
 - 1. open tone
 - 2. closed/muffled tone
 - 3. rim shot
 - 4. abanico
 - 5. cascara/shell pattern
- C. Try combining cascara and clave pattern.
- D. Play along with recordings.

3-2 Son Clave



3-2 Rumba Clave



Both "clave" patterns can be played in reverse form.

Guiro - one long note and two short notes.



Maracas - use wrist and keep each note even.



Bongo - Example A "Martillo Pattern"



Examples B, C, D - Bongo Variations

Timbales



This two-bar timbale pattern is commonly used in Latin music. The right hand plays what is called the "Cascara" (shell) pattern. The left hand plays the low drum. This pattern can also be played in reverse form.

Conga - This pattern is referred to as a "tumbao".



PB - Palm Base
F - Finger Base
^ - Slap
◇ - Open Tone



In order for one to become comfortable playing and learning about Latin Percussion, one must acquire recordings of various artist. Study and listen to the grooves and sounds. Play along with the recordings and play along with others. When possible, seek instruction from your local expert. There are also many instructional videos and texts available from the novice to the advanced player.

Lalo Davila

Lalo is currently Director of Percussion Studies at Middle Tennessee State University. Lalo received his Bachelor of Music degree from Corpus Christi State University and a Master of Music degree from the University of North Texas. Originally from Corpus Christi, Lalo has extensive experience both as an educator and performer. Lalo was named Nashville's Top Five 1998 Percussionist of the Year Award. Lalo spent three years (1984-1986) performing and instructing with University of North Texas Percussive Arts Society Championship Drum Line and has served as an instructor for the Phantom Regiment and the Star of Indiana Drum and Bugle Corps. Lalo has toured with many artists including the "Take 6" Summer 1996 tour of Japan. Other performances include; the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra, the Nashville Symphony, Six Pence and None The Richer, Clay Walker, Vickie Carr, Sherry Lewis, The Panhandlers Steel Band and Max Carl and the Big Dance. Currently, Lalo performs with several Latin groups including "Orkesta Eme Pe". Known as an outstanding clinician and adjudicator, Lalo has conducted clinics throughout the United States, Mexico, and Japan. Lalo is the author of "Contemporary Rudimental Styles and Solos". Lalo is an active clinician/performer for the Pearl Corporation, Row-Loff Productions, Avedis Zildjian Co., Innovative Percussion, and REMO Inc.