

# NCH

NATIONAL  
CONCERT  
HALL \ AN  
CEOLÁRAS  
NÁISIÚNTA

# MUSICAL WORLD:

## Exploring Music for Primary School Children - Cuba and the Caribbean

At Home Resource  
and Activity Pack

[nch.ie](http://nch.ie)



# WELCOME

Welcome to this edition of *Musical World*, a guide for primary school children to explore music from around the world!

Today we travel to the Caribbean, and the wonderful island of Cuba, where we will explore the infectious rhythms and exotic sounds of the music that has developed into Salsa, and has influenced so many other styles around the world.

We hope you enjoy the activities, links and images, and get inspired to make some music of your own!



## Cuban Music

Over the last 500 years the beautiful Caribbean island of Cuba has seen the arrival of people from many different countries including West Africa, Spain, Great Britain and France. This mix of traditions including African drumming and Spanish melodies and classical music from Europe, has led to a style of music we commonly call “Salsa” today.



Havana, Cuba

## Instruments used in Cuban music

While some of the instruments are common to many styles of music from around the world Cuba has some unique ones, particularly in the percussion (drums) section. Let's have a look at these. Click the instruments to watch a demonstration video!

**The congas** are direct descendants of the drums brought from Africa by the slaves and are made of wood and animal skin, usually cowhide. Nowadays the animal skin is often replaced by synthetic skins that are easier to tune and maintain.



### **Question:**

*How do you think Congas are played? With sticks or with your hands?  
Why do you think the drums are different sizes?*

**The Bongos** look like mini congas and are played together in joined pairs by placing between your knees. While they are descendants of African drums, the bongos are a uniquely Cuban instrument that was developed in the 19th century.





### Question:

*How do you think the sound of the bongos will be different from the sound of the congas? Why?*

**The Timbales** were developed from the timpani or kettledrums that you see in today's orchestras. Made of metal, they are played with sticks on both the top skin and the sides.



The most famous timbale player of all time was a man called Tito Puente who even appeared as a character on The Simpsons. Real fame indeed!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOyQc3TSyuA>

**The Guiro:** Pronounced "gwiro" is a scraper made from the husk of a fruit shell. Notches are cut into it and a stick is used to scrape it to create long and short sounds. This little instrument despite its simplicity is very important to the rhythm of salsa and other Cuban styles.



**Cowbells:** Straight from Daisy the cow's neck, these metal bells are very important in Cuban music. They can be played by a member of the group by holding them in their hand or by the timbale player who mounts them on their timbales using a bracket. Different size bells are used depending on the style of music being played.



**The Clave:** (Pronounced cla-veh) These are two wooden sticks that are played together to create a unique rhythm that is the heartbeat of Cuban music. We will look at this rhythm in more detail in the section on Cuban musical styles.



**Other instruments:** Many instruments that you would know from other styles are commonly used such as piano, bass, brass instruments and of course vocals (singing).

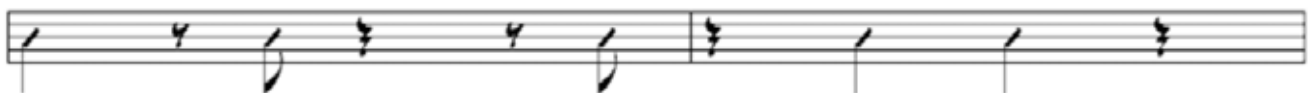




## Popular Cuban musical dance styles

In Cuban music there are many different styles, and today we will look at just three of the most popular.

**The Rumba:** This is a folkloric style that traditionally only uses drums and vocals. In its early days it was used to deliver news from Africa or to sing about the heroes of their time. Underpinning all Cuban music is a rhythm known as clave (pronounced cla-veh) and it is played on the instrument of the same name. The clave rhythm played for the rumba is written like this. Click on the written music to hear the clave rhythm. Can you clap along?



Here's a good example of traditional Cuban rumba, you can clearly see and hear the African influences.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaNfdh0iWCg>

**The Cha Cha** is a style that was developed in Cuba in the 1950's and is still very popular all over the world. The name of the rhythm comes from the sound the dancers make with their feet. Here's a clip of dancers doing the cha cha. Can you try their moves from home?

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8tlxKtK1MI>

**The Mambo** was a dance craze that started in Cuba again in the 1950's but became hugely popular in America and is featured in many movies. Tito Puente the timbale player we mentioned earlier was known as the "Mambo King" and led bands for over 50 years. Here's a good example of a Mambo used in a funny movie starring Jim Carey called The Mask.

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dyO9SWiY7k>

## Salsa Dancing

Salsa dance has become hugely popular worldwide and an essential part of Cuban music. Without the dancers the musicians wouldn't play and without the musicians the dancers can't dance. The dancing is always done in pairs with each taking to turns to shine. Learn some basic salsa steps from this video.

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfDVnX4j3-w>

And when you think you have that down have a look at these young dancers at work.

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YE-5gY6cwCE>

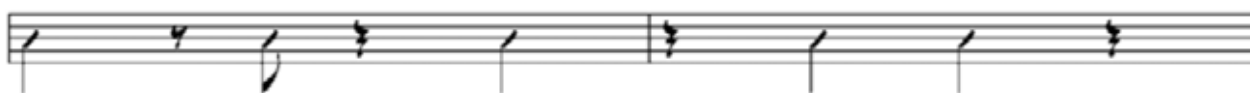




## Suggested activities:

### Clave (cla-veh)

We mentioned the clave earlier, which are two sticks played together. The rhythm they play is also called “clave” and that rhythm runs through lots of Cuban music. There are 2 types of clave rhythm; the rumba clave (which we looked at above) and the son clave. The son clave is the most popular clave used for dance styles in Cuba. It’s a simple rhythm that you can learn to clap. Click the rhythm below to hear the son clave:



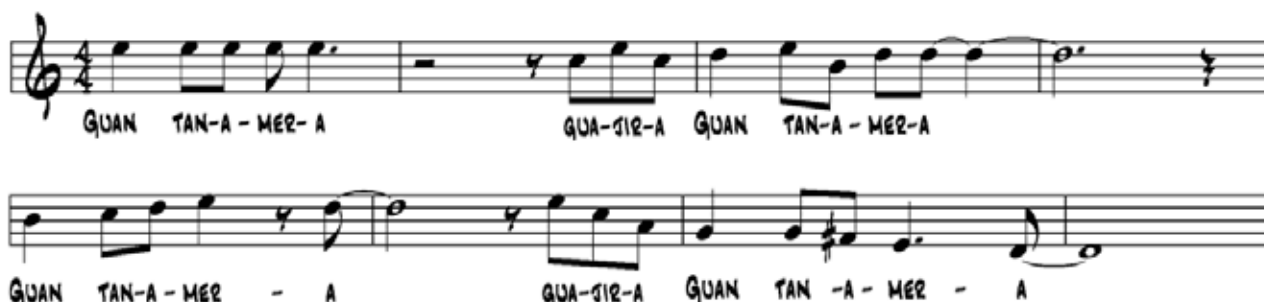
See if you can learn to clap the clave, or play it by clicking two sticks together.

## Learn a Cuban song

Probably the most famous tune from Cuba is called “Guantanamera” which is about a girl from an area in Cuba called Guantanamo. It is so popular even football fans have used the tune and replaced the words with their own versions to suit the team.

### Guantanamera

It doesn’t matter if you can’t speak Spanish, here is how the words should sound (more or less!): “Wan-ta-na-mera, waheera, wan-ta-na-mera. Wan-ta-na-mera, waheera, wan-ta-na-mera”



Many people have recorded this song, here's a nice version by **Celia Cruz** who was known as the Queen of Salsa.

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jaoXKpi7N4>

Try singing along with Celia on the chorus. Can you hear the clave rhythm in the background?



## Further Listening

Now that you've learnt about some of the common instruments in Cuban music, let's have a listen to how they sound!

Here's one of the world's greatest conga players, **Giovanni Hidalgo**, playing solo:

 <https://youtu.be/L6V8S8U9iIs>

And now for some bongos with **Karl Perazzo**, who has played with the band Santana, among many others:

 <https://youtu.be/a-G1OrKujks>

And now for the distinctive sound of the Timbales with **Diego Galé**:

 <https://youtu.be/SifhHkS5UfY>

Which of these percussion instruments do you like the most, and why?

Here's how all of the percussion instruments fit together in a band! This is a great clip of **Juanito Murrillo** (congas), **Diego Camacho** (timbales) and **Fabio Celorio** (bongo and bell) playing with some friends.

 <https://youtu.be/ZJqHuaaoT1Y>

They each get a chance to show off a bit by playing a solo each, starting from 1:30...

