

A Personal Perspective on Afro-Cuban Rhythmic Integration in Contemporary Jazz Composition

by

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Abstract

This presentation offers a personal perspective that resolves issues related to the notions of rhythmic conceptualization within the compositional process and the personalization of the compositional process through the linking of the aesthetics and values of Afro-Cuban rhythms and the stylistic dimensions of Afro-American jazz. This work also explores the compositional process of six original compositions that features a specific Afro-Cuban rhythm and posed different rhythmic integration challenges stimulated by a different ensemble or stylistic context.

Keywords: Afro-Cuban rhythm, avant-garde jazz, compositional process, rhythmic circularity, rhythmic harmony, conceptualization, and personalization.

Introduction

As an Afro-Cuban composer and pianist myself, I have always felt a strong passion for cultural linkages since the time I became involved with rhythms in my native country. Since then, I have also felt attracted by the critical circumstances in which African, Spanish, and Cuban identities developed together in the same territory and created a multicultural form of expression. From this idea of cultural hybridization, I learned to play Afro-Cuban rhythms by imitation, repetition and memorization, which according to John Blacking and Patricia Campbell are the basic processes that define learning through oral tradition¹. In addition, I always felt a deep passion for Afro-American popular music since the time I became involved with jazz, and I also felt a special attraction to jazz stylistic in terms of instrumentation, form, and touch but did not clearly conclude how the melodic and harmonic systems could work together.

While modern jazz compositional practices embrace a large number of styles and approaches, form is at the first level harmonically driven. Afro rhythms in contrast create circularity at odds with this forward moment. The term circularity refers to repeated sequences of a cyclical pattern, which can be repeated in loop to create interaction. With this work, I intend to emphasize this potential and revitalize the role of the piano in the rhythm section. In addition, I use the piano as a percussion instrument to superimpose harmonic and melodic rhythmic displacement, syncopation, and polyrhythm accentuations within the orchestration, which categorizes rhythmic functionality within different jazz devices and instrumentations.

By retaining the circularity, I also enable the original Afro rhythms to convey the holistic character of their original spiritual roots through the physicality of the rhythm, which is the distinctive aspect that constructs my contemporary vision from Afro-Cuban roots.

The Challenge of Composing Overture

The challenge in composing Overture was to integrate the 2/3 clave in such a way that this rhythm would remain true to its original accentuated pattern reflecting its circular effect that its repetition creates². This piece written for piano and 2/3 clave follows a moderate tempo in 4/4³ and shows the 2/3 clave used by the composers from the ensemble Muñequitos de Matanzas (The Matanzas Dolls) in their piece Homenaje a Cha Cha (Tribute to Cha Cha, 1994)⁴. I integrated the clave and the bass line in the left hand (LH) of the lowest register of the piano. I used the clave as a complement to the bass line⁵. Later on, I developed the bass lines from the rhythmic contour of the clave to establish a metronomic pattern to support the harmonic base, which I used to develop the melodic statement in the right hand (RH)⁶. In addition, the clave pattern helped me to accentuate the syncopated character of the bass line and also reinforced the depth of the lowest register in terms of timber.

The clave pattern also helped me to create a counterpoint effect from its juxtaposition with the bass line, which increased the level of rhythmic displacement. Nevertheless, the integration process required two preliminary steps before I started to work on the compositional process of Overture.

This preliminary process helped me to learn the 2/3 clave from inside out and gave me a better understanding about its relationship with 4/4 meter.⁷ Personally, I also think that this preliminary practice was very revealing to me.

It helped to assimilate accents from the 2/3 clave as much as its syncopated figures. It also provided me with the rhythmic base to support the thematic elaborations as well as the harmonic motions, which served me as preliminary ideas for orchestrating the piece⁸.

First, in order to learn to internalize the 2/3 clave part (Figure 1), I wrote the rhythmic pattern on a chart and read it several times in a loop.⁹ I played it with my hands and kept repeating it a few more times in order to feel the rhythm internally in my body.¹⁰ After becoming familiar with it, I noticed that I was creating some new rhythmic variations.¹¹ However, needing to deeply understand this pattern in relationship to its 4/4 metric, I clapped the clave with my hands and accentuated the four beats of the 4/4 metric with my left foot.

Figure 1. The 2/3 clave with an accent on beats one, two, three, and four:



Then, I kept clapping the clave with my hands and put an accent on the first beat of each bar:

Figure 2. The 2/3 clave with an accent on beat one of each bar:



After I practiced the exercise shown in Figure 2, I then practiced the clave with an accent on beat two of each bar, and then beats three and four as showed on (Figures 3 and 4):

Figure 3. The 2/3 clave with an accent on beat two:



Figure 4. The 2/3 clave with an accent on beat three:



Because I realized the accents on beats two and four were not easy to maintain, I practiced the exercise in Figure 5. I was now able to maintain the propulsion of the internal cyclical momentum:

Figure 5. The 2/3 clave with accents on beat two and four of each bar:



The combination of exercises also developed a high level of concentration in terms of feeling.

Compositional Process and Form of Overture

After I had concluded the internalization process, I started the compositional process of Overture. This piece follows an AABA form, which is a very common form in the standard American jazz repertory¹². First, I established the key of E minor to develop the bass line, which followed the syncopated figures of the clave as showed on (Figure 6). In bar two, the second sixteenth note of beat three and the second eighth note of beat four both match in both lines. However, the really interesting harmonic aspect about this line is its harmonic motion¹³. My harmonic choices from bars one to four allowed me to create an internal motion by moving the flat 6th of the Emin7(b6) chord to the natural 6th of the Emin6 chord followed by the flat 7th of the Emin7 chord. I think this is a very useful technique to enrich harmonic progression over a pedal point¹⁴.

Figure 6. *Overture.* The 2/3 clave with the bass line (LH):

The image displays a musical score for the bass line (LH) of an Overture. The score is written in 2/3 time and consists of nine measures. The bass line is accompanied by a rhythmic pattern in the treble clef, which is a 2/3 clave. The harmonic progressions are indicated by chord symbols: Emin7(b6) in measure 1, Emin6 in measure 2, Emin7 in measure 3, Emin7(b6) in measure 4, Emin6 in measure 5, Emin6 in measure 6, Emin6 in measure 7, Emin6 in measure 8, and Emin7(b6) in measure 9. The bass line features a steady eighth-note pattern, with some measures containing beamed eighth notes and quarter notes. The overall texture is simple and rhythmic, typical of a bass line in a clave-based piece.

Then, I used the rhythmic figures and the harmonic movements suggested by the bass to develop the main melody in the RH. I placed the main melody on the top of the line and harmonized it in three, two, and five note chords. Thus, I created a contrast between the RH chords, which allowed me to enrich the harmonies' color over the E pedal note. In bar one, I used only an Emin7(b6), and then I used the colors of EMaj7(#5), Emin7 and the poly-chord EbMaj7/E in bar two. Even though this section is a pedal point progression in the key of E minor, I also used an EMaj7(#5), which is called poly-modality¹⁵. This technique enabled me to use chords from both modes of the E minor and E major keys to enrich the harmonic progression. As for bars five, six, seven, eight, and nine, I constructed the chords' voicing in a parallel motion following the E Lydian mode¹⁶. I organized this parallel with closed intervals as well as minor and major thirds and a perfect fourth, which left more room for the principal melody to sound clearly at the top of the chord:

In that way, I made sure that I was able to relate my improvisations to the main theme. In terms of harmony, I built my lines from a particular set of scales: E Lydian, E natural minor, E harmonic minor, E melodic minor, as well as E flat Lydian augmented. The E flat Lydian augmented scale also served as a point of tension that allowed me to move out of the E pedal point sound.

The Challenge of Composing Distortions

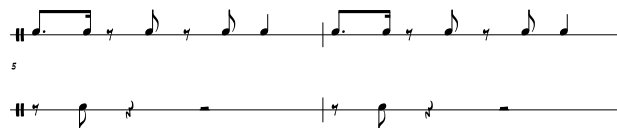
The primary challenge of the solo piano piece *Distortions* was to integrate the 3/2 and 2/3 claves together in such a way that these two patterns would remain true to their source while allowing more harmonic freedom than the first piece¹⁸. This piece written for piano and two claves was inspired by the rhythmic syncopations of the work of Cuban composer and pianist Emiliano Salvador who integrated the 3/2 clave in his piece *Para Luego Es Tarde* (So it's already late)¹⁹. First, I practiced the 3/2 clave with my hands and added the four up-beats in 4/4 with my foot. This exercise helped me to keep the clave in a loop without losing my pulse and to be able to feel it from its up-beats instead of having the strong beats as a reference:

Figure 9. The 3/2 clave with the four up-beats:



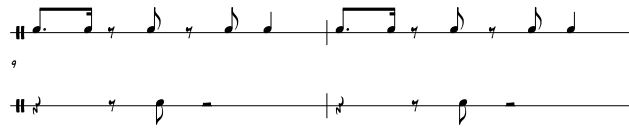
This first exercise was highly demanding and required a lot of concentration to feel the pulse in the up-beats. Then I retook the clave and combined it with up-beat one:

Figure 10. The 3/2 clave with up-beat one:



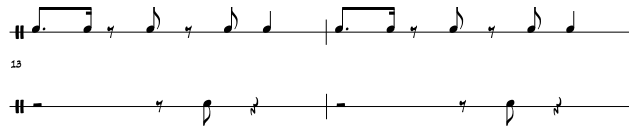
After having experimented with the clave and up-beat one, I next combined the clave with upbeat two:

Figure 11. The 3/2 clave with up-beat two:



Then, I combined the pattern with up-beat three to increase the level of difficulty regarding the pulse:

Figure 12. The 3/2 clave with up-beat three:



To complete the cycle with the up-beats, I practiced the 3/2 clave with up-beat four:

Figure 13. The 3/2 clave with up-beat four:



Once I had completed the cycle with the four up-beats, I combined the 2/3 clave up-beats one and three:

Figure 14. The 3/2 clave with up-beats one and three:



Then, I practiced the 3/2 clave with up-beats two and four, which demanded more concentration on my part to keep the pulse stable:

Figure 15. The 3/2 clave with up-beats two and four:



Compositional Process and Form of Distortions

To compose the Introduction-AB form of Distortions, I first traced the rhythmic figure of the 3/2 clave in the introductory melody from bars one to four²⁰. This pattern allowed me to create a polyrhythmic structure that I used to orchestrate my thematic elaborations in both sections. The first melodic statements were harmonized with a repetitive cluster chord going from F# to B in the RH, which refers to the key of C# minor and the scale of C# melodic minor²¹. Then, I designed the accompaniment in the LH with the 3/2 clave by using double cluster chords combining a C# minor (+7) chord with an A minor in the LH, which I used to add depth to the lowest register of the piano. This active harmonic approach gave more harmonic freedom compared to Overture, which follows a more static harmonic motion. In addition, this sense of Afro-Cuban lowness and deepness in the piano register is a permanent aspect of all my compositions that I use to celebrate my African ancestors' old spiritual omnipresence, as in the piece Overture.

Figure 16: Distortions. The introductory section, bars 1-4:



Section A is more active in terms of harmonic modulation²². In bar five, the melody begins with a descending melodic movement in the key of C# minor that modulates to the key of A major. Then, in bars six and seven, the melody modulates from D major to A flat major, but in bar eight the interval motions heighten the loudness and tension of the diminished C scale. Then, the melody modulates to the major keys of F, B flat, A, E, and B. In bar nine, the melody builds on the key of B flat major and then modulates to the keys of F# and C minor melodic. I highlighted the expanded tension of the melody by using major seventh intervals, which give more tension to the melodic statement in bar nine. Then, the melody is resolved in the chords of C# maj9 and Emaj9 before I present an ascending melodic line that goes from the lowest register to a higher one and is resolved in the poly-chord Cmin6/F#maj7. Rhythmically, I used the 3/2 clave as a metronome reference to support the thematic development from bars one to nine.

However, in bar ten I combined the original 3/2 pattern with a second 3/2 clave that starts on the second beat instead of the first. This poly-rhythmic effect increased the interaction between the claves and the piano's voices²³.

Figure 17. Distortions. Section A bars 5-12:

The image displays a musical score for Section A, covering bars 5 through 12. The score is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 5-8) features a treble clef with a 3/2 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is characterized by descending intervals and major seventh intervals. The bass line consists of a steady 3/2 clave pattern. The second system (bars 9-12) continues the melodic development with further modulations and includes a poly-rhythmic effect where a second 3/2 clave starts on the second beat. The key signature changes to one flat (F) in bar 10. The score concludes with a poly-chord resolution in bar 12.

Then, I used the up-beats two and four to accentuate the polychord F#maj7/Cmaj7 in bars thirteen to sixteen of section B. This tritone's relational chords served as a harmonic reference to develop my improvisation, which modulates from both keys.

Figure 18. Distortions. Section B bars 13-16:

The image shows a musical score for Section B, bars 13-16. It is an 'OPEN SECTION FOR PIANO SOLO'. The score is written in 4/4 time and features a piano solo in the upper staves and a percussion part in the lower staves. The piano solo is in the key of F# major (indicated by the chord F#MAJ7/C) and consists of a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The percussion part consists of a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is marked with a rehearsal symbol (B) and a measure number (13).

In addition, the 3/2 clave helped me to emphasize the syncopation of my improvised lines. Basically, I developed the accentuations of my lines from the original 3/2 figure and then I modulated them into the displaced one, starting on the second beat of the measure.

This effect of shaping improvisation by changing between the two claves enriched my approach in terms of metrics and accent displacement, which resulted in a vertical rhythmic perspective to compose²⁴. This aspect was gained in *Distortions* compared to the horizontal approach of *Overture*.

The Challenge of Composing Afro-Cubano

The challenge in composing this hybrid piece for piano, bass, drums and percussions was to integrate the complexity of the Afro rhythm across the quartet texture. This piece written in 4/4 for piano, acoustic bass, drums, and percussion follows a slow tempo and extends the work of Afro-American composer Dizzy Gillespie, the first to use the Afro rhythm in his composition *Cubana Bop*²⁵. His melodic and harmonic approach helped me to structure my thematic elaborations and harmonic motions. I was particularly inspired by his particular way to organize dominants, altered and diminished chords in relationship with the extensions 9, b9, #9, 11, #11, b5, 13 and b13. First, I modified the original Afro rhythm figure and integrated it, which provided the piece with a metronomic guide to support both the melodic and harmonic statements and helped me to strengthen the rhythm section's sound. I started the internalization process by practicing the original Afro rhythm with the 2/3 clave in 4/4. This exercise was a great challenge regarding the complexity of both rhythms' syncopations and accent displacements played simultaneously:

Figure 19. The afro rhythm and the 2/3 clave:



Then, I modified the Afro pattern. In fact, I changed the two eighth notes of beat two in bar one to a sixteenth note tied to an eighth note and a sixteenth note. This slight modification gave a more interactive effect to the Afro rhythms in relation to the 2/3 clave's accentuations:

Figure 20. The Afro figure with a slight modification on beat two:



I then made a new modification in the Afro pattern. This time, I changed the quarter note from beat four in bar one to a sixteenth note tied to an eighth note and a sixteenth note.

Figure 21. The Afro pattern with a slight modification on beats two and four:



Next, I changed the quarter note from beat four in bar two to a sixteenth note tied to an eighth note and a sixteenth note:

Figure 22. The Afro figure with a slight modification on beat four of bar two:



This experiment resulted in a complex polyrhythmic pattern whose accents later created an overlapping effect between the bass line and the piano during the compositional process.

Compositional Process and Form of Afro Cubano

To create this AB form, I used the result shown in Figure 22 as a rhythmic complement to support the pulse of the entire piece²⁶. It enabled me to stabilize the pulse and also helped to establish the base rhythmic groove before developing the harmonic motion and the melodic line in the left hand (LH). The melody follows the jazz colors and chord motions of the Gmin7(b6) chord, starting with the tonic, the fifth, the sixth, and flat third in bars one to four, while in bars five to eight the line modulates to the Fmaj7 chord over G. From bar nine to bar 12, the LH again follows the Gmin7(b6) chord, and in bars thirteen to sixteen, the melody modulates to the Fmaj7 chord over G and then to F#Maj7(#5) and F#Maj7 in bars 17 to 20.

Figure 23. Afro-Cubano. A section, bars 1-4:

I next set up a point pedal based on the Fmin7(b6) chord from bars 21 and 22 and the Fmaj7(#11) chord in bars 23 and 24, and I used the LH line to create a melodic motion between both chords.

Figure 24. Afro-Cubano. Section B, bars 21-24:

The musical score for Section B, bars 21-24, is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 21-24) is in 4/4 time and features a piano accompaniment. The right hand plays a G MIN 7(b6) chord in the treble clef, while the left hand plays a bass line in the bass clef. The second system (bars 25-28) is also in 4/4 time and features a piano accompaniment. The right hand plays an F MIN 7(b6) chord in the treble clef, while the left hand plays a bass line in the bass clef. The score includes a rhythm section with a snare drum and a conga.

Section B is less static and longer than section A. In writing section B from bar 21 to 40, I used the same harmonic movement as in bars 21 to 24. However, in bar 33, I decided to develop the theme and create short variations. I was prompted to create these variations in order to overcome the static feeling for this section. I was also pushed to develop the harmonic progression, which follows the Fsus4/D chord in bars 33 and 34; Dmaj7 in bar 35; Cmin7(b6), Fsus4/D and EbMaj7(#5) in bar 36; Absus4/F, Bbsus4/G and AbMaj7(#5) in bar 38; and Amin7(b6) in bar 40.

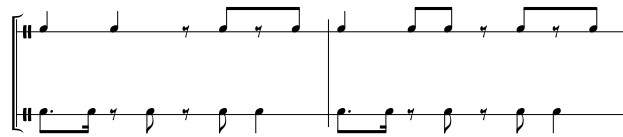
The harmonic motion from section B also enriches the thematic development with a colorful statement combined with the metronomic accompaniment from the rhythm section²⁷. The less static feeling is created through the feeling of a rhythm which embraces a broad harmonic motion that modulates more through different keys' centers instead of the pedal point feel from section A²⁸.

Figure 25. Afro-Cubano. Section B, bars 29-35:

The Challenge of Composing Free Cuba

The challenge in composing Free Cuba was to integrate both the cascara and the countour-bell patterns in the drums parts which would typically be orchestrated. This piece written for piano, acoustic bass, drums and percussion extends the work of Cuban composer Frank Emilio Flynn who used the cascara in his piece Mondongo, Gandinga y Sandunga (Tripe, Leather, and Flavor)²⁹. I was inspired by this piece because of its syncopated rhythmic interaction and overlap between the melody and the bass line. Only, I integrated the pattern in such a way that this figure would remain true to its source. I created a series of new exercises with both figures in order to learn how to better internalize the cascara.

Figure 28. The cascara with a slight modification on beat three from bar one:



I proceeded with a final modification that allowed me to create a new syncopated figure from the basic contour of the cascara, thus putting the up-beats in front.

Figure 29. The cascara with a slight modification on beat three from bar one:



This approach helped me to internalize different rhythmic cells which I later used during the compositional process to increase the syncopated effect of the rhythm section³¹. The cascara also served as a metronomic reference to support the bass line. These exercises not only allowed me to integrate two rhythmic figures in the same drum part, but they also allowed me to create a rhythmic supplement to accompany the congas (See, Figure 23. Afro-Cubano. A section, bars 1-4).

Compositional Process and Form of Free Cuba

During the compositional process of this AABA form, the cascara served me as a rhythmic guide to structure the bass line in section A³². This is why the bass line follows exactly the same rhythmic figure of the cascara with a slight difference in beat four of bar two. In fact, while the cascara shows a quarter note on beat four of bar two, the bass line presents an eighth-note rest and an eighth note. This slight difference is enough to create an overlapping effect between the cascara and the bass line, which strongly emphasizes the accents on the up-beats.

Figure 30. Free Cuba. Section A, bars 1-4:

Musical score for Figure 30, Section A, bars 1-4. The score is for Piano, Acoustic Bass, Drum Set, and Percussion. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. The piano part has a melodic line with chords B^bMIN⁷, E^b11, B^bMIN⁷, A^b11, and B^bMA⁷. The acoustic bass, drum set, and percussion parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment.

The pattern also created an interesting change from 4/4 to 6/4 time that occurs in the transition between bars nine and ten, which posed a challenge to me and my ensemble in keeping the pulse at the transition point. This change gives consistence to the very beginning melodic statement at this point, which inspired me to repeat it in circles with a ternary feel.

Figure 31. Free Cuba. Head in, bars 9-10:

Musical score for Figure 31, Head in, bars 9-10. The score is for Piano, Acoustic Bass, Drum Set, and Percussion. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 6/4 between bars 9 and 10. The piano part has a melodic line with chords B^bMIN⁷(B⁹), E^b11, A^p11, B^bMIN⁷(B⁹), and A^b11. The acoustic bass, drum set, and percussion parts provide a rhythmic accompaniment.

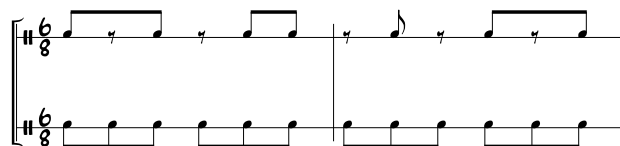
As for the harmony, the bass line follows the main root notes of the chords Bbmin7 and Ebm7, which support the melodic development from bars one to eight. From bar nine to bar 11, the harmony follows the progression of the Bbmin7, Eb11, and Ab11 chords.

From bar 12 to bar 13, I created an ascending cycle of C#13(#11), D13(#5), Eb13(#11), E13(#11), A13(#11), and D7(b5) dominant chords. This cycle helped me to create a slight tension within the main melody of section A. I then developed section B, which follows a lyrical melody and has more syncopated figures. In this section I used the melody as the key element to drive the harmonic movements as Ebmin7 in bar 16, Abmin7 and Db7(b9) in bar 17, F #min7/C# in bar 18, Bmin7 and E7(b5) in bar 19, Emin7(b5) in bar 20, Cmin7(b6) and Db11 in bar 21, and Fmin7(b5) and Bb7(b9) in the bar 22.

The Challenge of Composing Obatala

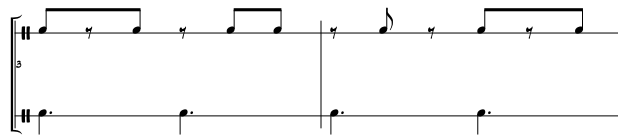
The challenge in composing Obatala was to integrate the 6/8 ternary clave in such a way that this pattern remains true to its source³³. This single pattern shows both a binary and a ternary pulse on its own, which can really challenge its overlapping effect within the rhythm section. This piece written for piano, acoustic bass, drums, and percussions extends the work of Cuban composer Chucho Valdez who used this clave on his piece Irakere³⁴. Obatala extends Valdez's approach in the way the 6/8 clave's accentuations are used to overlaps with the piano (RH) melody and syncopated chord progression³⁵. Due to the complexity of this pattern, I started by practicing it with claps. I noticed that this pattern of two measures was quite complex and rich in terms of syncopated variations. Then, I practiced it one more time with claps and accentuating every eighth note in 6/8.

Figure 32. The 6/8 clave and its six beats:



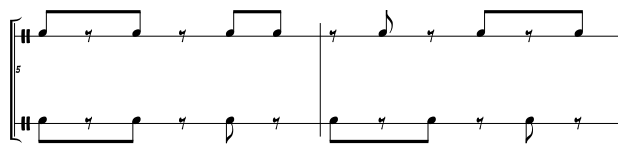
Then, I played the 6/8 clave combined with two dotted quarter notes per bar.

Figure 33. The 6/8 clave with two dotted quarter notes per bar:



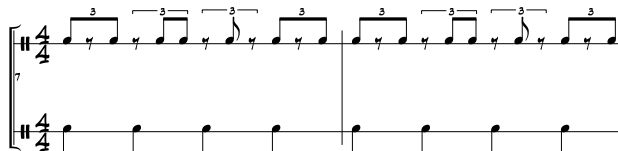
I practiced the 6/8 clave with an eighth note on beats one, three, and five.

Figure 34. The 6/8 clave on beats one, three and five:



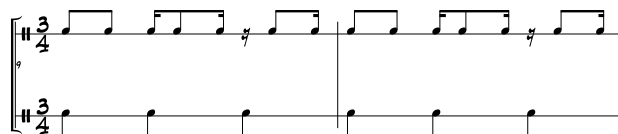
To move on, I wrote the 6/8 clave in 4/4, accentuating the four beats of the measure.

Figure 35. The 6/8 clave in 4/4:



Finally, I rewrote the 6/8 clave in 3/4 and practiced it by tapping the three beats of the measure simultaneously with my feet.

Figure 36. The 6/8 clave in 3/4:



Compositional Process and Form of Obatala

To compose the AAB form of Obatala in the form AAB, I decided to use the original figure to enrich the rhythm section in section A, which I developed from bar one to bar 29³⁶. Then, I changed the 6/8 meter to 4/4 to develop the 6/8 rhythmic contour in a different way in section B from bar 30 to bar 57.

This section is also more active and has fewer rests compared to section A. Then I changed the 4/4 meter to 3/4, which gave me a new perspective regarding the transition between meters in the solo section. However, the creation of Obatala required a preliminary step to reflect on these three possibilities for adapting the same rhythm in three different meters. The juxtaposition of the 6/8 clave and the percussion rhythmic pattern served me as a guide for structuring the rhythmic contour of the bass line. I simplified the rhythmic Figure of the 6/8 clave and reproduced it on the bass line³⁷. Then, I used the bass line to develop harmonic base notes as the tonic and the fifth to elaborate the main melody in the right hand (RH) of the piano.

Figure 37. Obatala, Section A, bars 1-9:

The musical score for Obatala, Section A, bars 1-9, is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled 'A' and 'GMaj11', is in 6/8 time. It features a Piano part with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The rhythm section includes Electric Bass, Drum Set, and Percussion. The second system, labeled 'C Min 7(b9)', is in 4/4 time. It features a Piano part with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The rhythm section includes Electric Bass, Drum Set, and Percussion.

I developed the main modal melody and harmony of the RH in the key of G Major. In bars one to four, I presented the GMaj7(add11) and G7 chords as a harmonic motion and in bars six to nine the Cmin7(b6) chords from the C natural minor scale. Next, I developed the main melody in bars 10 to 13, which follow the AbMaj7, Ebdim7, AbMaj7, F#dim7, and G#dim7 chords. These last diminished chords helped me to create tensions before resolving the modulation to the key of F#Maj7 in bar 16. From bar 18, the melody modulates from the key of E Major to Ab Major³⁸.

This same modulation is repeated from bar 22 to bar 25 before the conclusion of the melodic development with the AbMaj7 and Absus4(add9) chords in bars 26 to 29. In addition, I used the 6/8 clave in 4/4 to develop section B. This helped me to contrast sections A and B in terms of meters. I used the strong beats in 4/4 to give a metronomic character to the RH line, while the LH develops the main melody in unison with the bass.

The harmony follows the Fmin9 chords in bars 30 and 31, the Ebmin7 and Ab11 chords in bars 32 and 33, the Ab13(b9) chord in bars 34, 35, and 36, the F13(b9) in bar 37, the EMaj11 in bars 38 and 39, the C#Maj7 in bar 40, the Ab11 in bar 41, and the Amin7(b6), G13 in bar 57.

Figure 38. Obatala. Section B, bars 30-33:

Then, I concluded the harmonic progression in section B with a Dmin7(b6) chord from bar 58 to bar 65. This section also served as a reference for improvising with the LH. Rhythmically, I integrated the 6/8 clave in 3/4, which gives more angularity and displacement to my improvised lines.

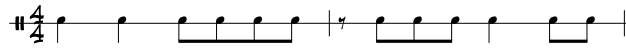
Figure 39. Obatala. Solo section, bars 58-61:

The musical score for Figure 39 is written in 3/4 time and consists of two systems of staves. The first system (bars 58-61) is labeled "OPEN SOLO SECTION:" and features a piano solo section with chords and a drum solo section with a complex rhythmic pattern. The second system (bars 62-65) continues the piano solo section with chords and the drum solo section. The score includes a piano part with chords and a bass line, and a drum part with a complex rhythmic pattern. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is marked with "D MIN 7(b9)" and "OPEN SOLO SECTION:".

The Challenge of Composing Black Eyes

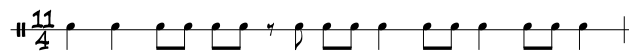
The challenge in composing Black Eyes was to integrate the countour-bell pattern. The challenge is about putting the original pattern in a meter seemingly at “odd” which forces changes in its circular accentuation pattern³⁹. This particular challenge somehow extends the changing meters approach showed in the piece Obatala and differs from the rest of the other four pieces Overture, Distortions, Afro-Cubano, and Free Cuba which show a unique meter through their entire forms. This piece written for piano, acoustic bass, and drums features the modified countour-bell used by composer Cesar Pedrosa on his piece Para Que? (For What?)⁴⁰. First, I practiced the original figure in 4/4:

Figure 40. The countour-bell pattern in 4/4:



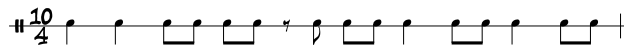
Then, I inserted the original accents and syncopation of the countour-bell in a single bar of 11/4 and added a quarter note on beat nine, two eighth notes on beat 10, and a quarter note on beat 11:

Figure 41. The countour-bell in 11/4:



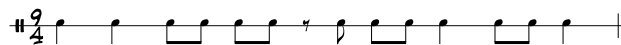
Next, I wrote the pattern in 10/4 and added a quarter note on beat nine and two eighth notes on beat 10:

Figure 42. The countour-bell in 10/4:



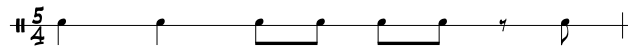
Then, I wrote the Figure in 9/4 and added a quarter note on beat nine to complete the first bar's phrase:

Figure 43. The countour-bell in 9/4:



Finally, I wrote the Figure in 5/4, this time inserting the original Figure 3.40 from beats one to five only:

Figure 44. The countour bell's original, Figure 3.40 inserted in 5/4:



Once I had a first set of exercises, I experimented with different combinations of the exercises shown in Figures 3.41 and 3.42.

Figure 45. The countour-bell, Figures 3.41 and 3.42:

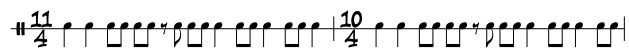
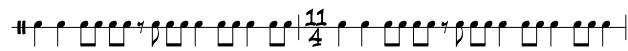


Figure 46. The countour-bell, Figures 3.42 and 3.41:



Then, I practiced the combination between Figures 3.41 and 3.43

Figure 47. The modified countour-bell, Figures 3.41 and 3.43:

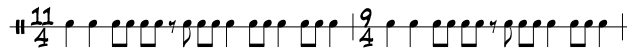


Figure 48. The countour-bell, Figures 3.43 and 3.41:

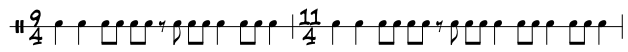


Figure 49. The countour-bell, Figures 3.42 and 3.43:

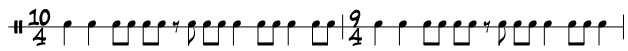


Figure 50. The countour-bell, Figures 3.43 and 3.42:

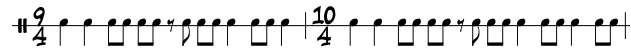


Figure 51. The countour-bell, Figures 3.43 and 3.44:

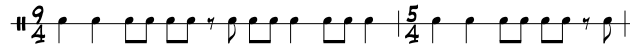
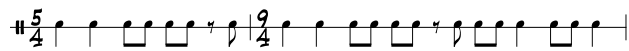


Figure 52. The countour-bell, figures 3.44 and 3.43:



This rhythm served as a reference point for playing in various irregular metrics within the different sections of the piece. This was achieved by inserting the syncopated accents and figures of this pattern into the irregular meters 11/4, 10/4, 9/4 and 5/4. This gave me new cell figures with which I developed the rhythmic contour and accentuations of the main melody in the right hand (RH) in relation to the counter-melody of the left hand (LH).

Compositional Process for AA'BA form of Black Eyes

To create the AA'BA form of Black Eyes, I used this countour-bell pattern as shown in Figure 45 to support the thematic elaborations of section A⁴¹. In addition, I developed the main melody of the E minor pentatonic jazz scale in the (LH), which is also doubled on the bass line⁴².

Figure 53. Black Eyes. Section A, bars 1-4:

The accentuations from the main melody interact against the countour-bell accents and create tension and dynamics for the harmonic development of the (RH). In bars one to three, the main melody follows the Bsus4 (add3)/F# chord succeeded by the F#Maj7(#11) chord and then the Amin7(b6) chord in bar five, the Gmin7(add11) and EMaj11 chords in bar six, and the Bbsus4(add3)/F# in bars seven and eight. Bars seven and eight also reveal the countour-bell figure, as illustrated in Figure 54:

Figure 54. Black Eyes. Section A, bars 7-8:

Section B follows the Fsus4(add3)/A and FMaj9 chords in bar nine, the Dbsus49(add3) chord in bar 10, the DbMaj7(#5) and DbMaj7 chords in bar 11, the Ebsus4(add3)/Bb and Csus4(add3)/G chords in bar 12, and then the GMaj7/D chord in bars 13 and 14, the F#13(b9) chord in bar 15, the AbMaj7(#5) chord in bar 16, the Fmaj7/C and Cdim7 chords in bar 17, and the C#min7, Bsus4(add3)/A#, Dsus4(add3)/G and Bsus4(add3)/D# chords in bar 18. Bars 19 and 20 follow the same harmonic movement as bars 17 and 18. In addition, bars 15 and 16 reveal the countour-bell pattern, as illustrated in Figure 55:

Figure 55. Black Eyes. Section B, bars 15-16:



Finally, I used section A to complete the form of the piece. In this section I also used the countour-bell as illustrated in Figure 56:

Figure 56. Black Eyes. Section A', bars 27-28:



Conclusion

The six original works that I created for this paper share a number of points in common: I developed them all from a rhythmic conception at the beginning before I presented the melodic statement and the harmonic motion.

The pieces use very short forms, such as AB, ABA, and AABA, and they all include chord motions within the melodic development. They all resulted from an experiment in hybridization that encapsulated both approaches: Afro-Cuban rhythmic harmony and rhythmic circularity.

However, their particular writing techniques also reveal several challenges with respect to rhythmic integration in relation to melodic trait. The new rhythmic cells derived from the original patterns served to create melodic elaboration and give a sense of angularity to the melody. Rhythmic cells also gave motion and circularity to the harmonic chords' progression in terms of resolutions and chord superposition.

The process of producing hybrid pieces illuminated my philosophical thinking about Afro-Cuban rhythms and their importance in shaping my own cultural identity and jazz artistic ideals as a composer and improviser. For example, in the pieces *Overture* and *Distortions*, I first tried to use the whole patterns of the 2/3 and 3/2 claves as the rhythmic body for the accompaniment of my left hand. This experiment produced an overwhelmed feeling in my left hand. This exercise surcharged the repetitive sound of my left hand, which brought the chords' darkness to the fore instead of producing a rhythmic support. In my opinion, these challenges and experimentations provided a guide for me to reflect on issues about rhythmic integration in hybrid jazz compositions that may be faced by today's composers.

The compositional part helped me to reflect on my own individuality and personality as a jazz composer and improviser. It also provided me with a set of exercises to internalize and integrate rhythmic patterns that remain true to the original source but progressively move towards more complexity, such as modified patterns that modulate and highly polyrhythmic patterns. However, the most valuable experience was the creative process itself, which helped me to reflect on the rhythms and their impacts within each of the six compositions.

This creative process provided me with a personal path for rhythmic integration that embraces my background as a composer, pianist, and percussionist.

The compositional plan allowed me to shape the melodic timbers of my pieces through rhythmic contours and taste the differences between a very rare form of orchestration as piano and claves gradually modulate into a jazz trio with a percussion instrument.

The piece *Distortions* is the best example of balanced melody and harmony, even though this composition is entirely rooted in rhythmic components. In fact, I shaped its melodic development with the figure of the 3/2 clave and the harmonic motion simultaneously. In that way, I ensured that the rhythmic contour of the melodic statement followed a close relationship with the original 3/2 clave. Then, I used harmony as a source to construct my thematic elaboration. However, the 3/2 clave is less present within the harmonic textures of *Distortions* compared to *Overture*. In *Overture*, the 2/3 clave is more present and defined in the score. It also blends better for piano solo. However, the thematic development is more static and does not develop far beyond the central E minor pedal point, which allowed me to put the harmonic movement in the foreground and the rhythmic figure in the background as a metronomic line.

In *Free Cuba*, I used the countour-bell in the same way I used the 3/2 clave in *Overture*, but I had the opportunity to combine it with the cascara pattern, which gives a more stable and syncopated accompaniment in the rhythm section. Melodically and harmonically speaking, the harmonic progression drove the melodic elaborations but not the rhythms, as in the case of *Distortion*, in which I used the rhythmic cell of the 3/2 clave and transformed it into new cells to create the thematic elaboration of the right hand (RH). I would also point out that in bar nine of *Free Cuba* the melody outlines the ternary 6/4 meter against the rhythm section's pulse, which increases rhythmic activity and interaction. This same effect also occurs in the piece *Obatala*, in which the melodic statements outline the ternary 3/4 meter against the 6/8 clave and the binary rhythm's pulse.

However, in the piece *Afro-Cubano*, the main melody outlines the harmonic motion more than the meters do. The melody chiefly outlines the inner minor chords' colors and motions, the diminished 7 V chord over I and the left hand (LH) harmonic counterpoint against the RH melodic development. In *Black Eyes*, the melody outlines the 10/4, 11/4, and 5/4 meters against the rhythm section's pulse to increase rhythmic overlapping between the piano's melodic-harmonic elaboration, the bass line, and the drum claves. These three meters provided me with three different claves, which I combined to create a counterpoint between the RH and the LH and to shape the melodic-harmonic statements.

I believe that the writing techniques of *Overture*, *Distortions*, and *Afro-Cubano*, in which I used the original rhythm to create a metronomic polyrhythm to support the rhythm sections, put the rhythm at the forefront. The writing techniques of *Free Cuba*, *Obatala*, and especially *Black Eyes*, in which I modified the original rhythm and then modulated it in highly polyrhythmic patterns, made the rhythms more subtle in the process of arranging. In addition, the juxtaposition of a binary pulse over a ternary meter in *Obatala* highlights the overlapping effect between the 6/8 clave and the RH melody. However, the use of irregular meters in the *Black Eyes* gives a sense of rhythmic circularity to the arrangement.

In conclusion, the compositional process resulted in a set of multifunctional images, such as the holistic pieces *Overture* and *Distortions*, in which the spatial character of sacred Afro-Cuban songs build from the harmonic loudness and melodic lowness of the LH; the popular Afro-Cubano, *Free Cuba*, and *Obatala*, which represent the melodic shape of Afro-Cuban vocal sound inflexions, build from melodic angularity; and the energetic and very compacted *Black Eyes* emphasizes the quantitative dimensions of rhythms from an analytical treatment within up-beat meters.

This cultural reconciliation has enriched my compositional process and also helped me to move to a higher level in terms of melodic-harmonic jazz conception.

However, I also believe that this research can open a new door to explore rhythmic integration in jazz composition on an even higher level that focuses on superimposed circularity between irregular metrics. This exploration in terms of harmonic rhythm challenged the performance practice during my rehearsals. The particular displacement and syncopated pulse of the rhythms was difficult to feel and incorporate within the harmonic chord progression. Another challenge was to keep a balance between the melody and rhythmic circularity when using large intervallic motions, which provided my pieces with a strong sense of angularity.

Through the observation of my rehearsals and practice, I noticed that syncopation enriched the physicality of rhythms. The syncopated approach impacted my thematic elaborations and provided the pieces with multiple discourses and a sense of rhythmic harmonized melody. In addition, motion allowed me to feel naturally the rhythms in my body and express myself through an omnipresent rhythmic ideal. With the hope that this research will bring me new issues regarding a more advanced level of rhythmic overlapping, I wish this research also to be useful material for the generation of Afro-Cuban Jazz composers to come.

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