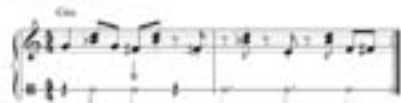


How to tell if a Montuno is in 2:3 or 3:2 Clave

Generally, a montuno has one bar that is more on the beat than the other. The 'on the beat' bar corresponds to the '2' side of the clave, which often has accents on the downbeat.

However, this is a very complex definition. Although the montunos from the intro of *Son de la Playa* is in 2:3 clave, this may not be immediately obvious to someone unused to playing Latin music. To clarify, here's an example of another 2:3 montuno featuring an almost identical rhythm, with the 2:3 clave shown below:

Fig. 2.6 Montuno like *Son de la Playa*



As shown by the arrows, the montuno has a strong third downbeat on the '2' side of the clave.

There are no downbeats on either 'two' or 'three' in the second bar.

Here's another montuno over the same chord, in which the accent on the third beat occurs in the second bar only, in a 3:2 pattern. This montuno is used in the left hand of the next piece, *Montuno Steps*:

Fig. 2.7 Montuno like *Son de la Playa*

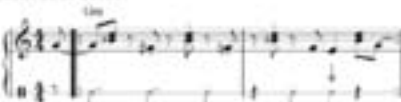


The key can be simply stated thus:

- Montunos usually have a strong 2nd or 3rd downbeat on the '2' side of the clave.

Please note a bar that a 3:2 montuno often avoids the first beat completely, this being anticipated on the 'two end' of the previous bar.

Fig. 2.8 3:2 montuno with the 'two end'



For an example of another 3:2 montuno like Fig. 2.8, see *Cumbia Flores*, bars 23–4 (p. 22). The second montuno in this tune (bars 37–44) is more 'neutral' in character, since it has a strong accent on the third beat in both bars:

Fig. 2.9 Montuno *El Viejo Cumbia Flores* (back of clave)



A complete list of all the montunos in this book is given on p. 198.

Assignments: getting to know the clave

Play the exercises below slowly in time with the metronome. This will help later when you have to play against the various Cuban percussion patterns.

1. **Play the montuno whilst tapping the clave.** Play Figs 2.6 and 2.7 over and over in the right hand, tapping the relevant clave pattern in the left hand.

2. **Practice scales with a clave inflexion.** Play a scale in the right hand and the clave in the left. As shown below, 'twist' the scale by going down to the 7th at the end of the second bar, so that the last falls on the first beat of the next bar.

Fig. 2.10 Exercise scale with 3:2 clave inflexion



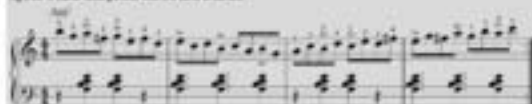
It's also important to be able to extend the scales over more than six notes, without losing track of the clave. Here's an example using an F7 (dominant) scale:

Fig. 2.11 F7 scale (two octaves) with 3:2 clave inflexion



3. **Stravel with scale patterns.** It's also fun to practice scale patterns in a stravel way. The following exercise shows a typical stravel pattern based on an F minor (Cuban) scale, with a restless first hand in the left hand.

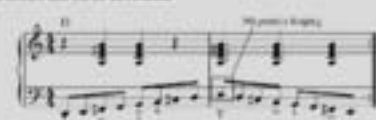
Fig. 2.12 A stravel scale pattern with 3:2 clave inflexion



For more information on scale patterns, see LP Vol. 1, pp. 90–2.

4. **Reverse the left and right hands.** Now by simple exercises with leftward scales, and see how you get on playing the clave in the right hand.

Fig. 2.13 Simple leftward scale with 3:2 clave inflexion



Note how Fig. 2.13 goes us to the 5th of the scale (E), another way of 'twisting' it.



Cha-Cha-Chá

Between around 1870 and 1930 the dominant style of music in Cuba was the *danzón*, a popular dance form which we'll explore at the end of this chapter (p. 97). In mid-1930s Havana the violinist and composer Enrique Jorda (1916-87) experimented with new ways of playing the *danzón*, eventually creating the *cha-cha-chá* which he named after the sound of the dancers' feet.

Cha-cha-chá (often shortened to *cha-cha*) was an instant and phenomenal international success – not surprising, as it's great fun to play and easy to dance to as well. An important Cuban group in this style was 'Orquesta Aragón' (see Suggs and Lanning, p. 198).

One of the most recognizable elements of *cha-cha* is the single cowbell pattern played by the timbal player, consisting of 4 downbeats in every bar:

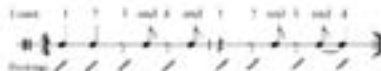
Fig 2.21 *Cha-cha bell pattern*



There are two piano rhythm patterns characteristic of *cha-cha-chá*, which are quite different from each other. The first rhythm is often played as two-handed chords on the piano, as in the introduction to *Oye Cómo Va* (overleaf).

Fig 2.22 *Cha-cha pattern, for piano*

(a) Two-handed chords



Clap this pattern against a steady foot-tap on the downbeats, paying particular care with the placement of the notes in the second bar. To start with, try counting out loud to keep track of where the 'one' is in each bar.

Can you hear how this pattern is equivalent to three pairs of quarter notes, with the second and third pair played off the beat? The following notation is unconventional, but makes this clearer:

(b) *Reverse notation*



The second rhythm typically involves left-hand chords on every upbeat, while the right hand plays a simple on-the-beat pattern:

(c) *Uphat chords in the left hand*



Practice tapping Fig 2.22 (b) on your knee as shown. Mastering the coordination of this will prepare you for playing it on the piano during the percussion section at letter 'E' in the next tune, *Oye Cómo Va*, one of most widely known numbers in the entire Latin repertoire.

Thickening the Melody

In order to create a fuller sound, you could play the right hand of *Mamy Blue* in thirds, as shown below. The melody now stays on top:

Fig. 4.10 Thickening the melody with thirds

For section 'B' sixths are a better option, but the melody must be played an octave higher. Again, always keep the melody note as the top note:

Fig. 4.11 Thickening the melody with sixths

If you find it hard to play the double notes, that's maybe because you haven't been practicing your scales in double thirds (or sixths) recently! See EP Vol. 1, p. 208 (thirds) and p. 41 (sixths). Check the fingering carefully.

Further examples of these melody-thickening techniques are given in BP, p. 31 (see See Riders), p. 46 (Demarcated Rhythms), and in EP Vol. 1, p. 61 (Mamabomb).

Assignments: Mamá Lloro

1. Learn the engraving slowly. Practice the hands separately and together, slowly at first, and by playing along with the CD. Before attempting the remaining assignments, master the coordination and fingering, and memorize the bass line.

2. **Thicken and/or reharmonize the melody.** Apply the thirds and sixths treatment to the right hand as shown above. Note how Fig. 4.6 combines both with embellishments of lines – this is optional.

3. **By using left-hand variations.** The left-hand accompaniment can also be thickened and embellished (see below). Practice the pattern shown in Fig. 4.10 and adapt it for the other chords of the tune so you can use it throughout if you wish.

4. **Apply thickening techniques to other tunes.** Try a tune you know well and can play at a single line initially with a bass line in the left hand. Now add some thirds and/or sixths under the melody note to give a fuller right-hand sound. Always check the chord symbols to make sure your choices relate to the harmony of the tune.

Tango accompaniment patterns

The lack of drums or percussion in a typical tango band, or perhaps those, has led to a tradition of tango musicians creating percussive effects on the body of their instruments, or simply by incorporating an exaggerated attack in their playing of selected notes. This is particularly true of the piano, whose accompaniment patterns often include very strong accents on the fourth beat.

Fig. 4.12 Typical piano accompaniment for tango

Play the above left-hand accompaniment with an exaggerated accent on the fourth beat, as shown. Sometimes a glissando is included between the low bass note (usually the 2nd of the chord) and the root, giving an even more percussive effect in imitation of a 'ruff' on a snare drum, as shown by the chromatic grace notes in the following example:

Fig. 4.13 Variation with grace notes

The grace notes should be played before the beat, so that the D and G in bars 2 and 4 above remain on the first beat of the bar.

Fig. 4.3 represents an easy way to play a tango in the left hand. The pattern can be adapted to give a fuller sound by using wider leaps and thicker chord settings, eg

Fig. 4.14 More robust octaves

It's also common to find a strong accent on the 'four and', as in bars 1 and 2 of the following example:

Fig. 4.15 Left-hand chords with accents 'two and'

The best piano Tim's Temps (download) is a simple example of the genre, which includes the left-hand patterns from Figs 4.2 and 4.11 above.