



Handout 1: Select Latin American Genres

Reggaeton

Region of Origin: Jamaica/Panama/Puerto Rico

Background: Reggaeton is a hybrid genre which mixes reggae, rap, and Latin American music styles. Though it emerged in the 1990s, Reggaeton has a long developmental history that spans both decades and countries.

In the early 1900s, the United States began construction on the Panama Canal—one of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken. As a result, thousands of Jamaicans moved to Panama to work on the canal. These immigrants and their children maintained a close connection with their homeland, and were aware of cultural developments occurring in Jamaica, including the rise of Reggae in the 1960s. It was only a matter of time before Panamanians also began embracing Reggae, and soon singers and groups such as Renato y La 4 Estrellas started covering Reggae songs in Spanish. A new style was born: Reggae en Español.



Don Omar in Concert

Reggae en Español then spread to New York City, with the help of Panamanian immigrants. There the genre was soon embraced by the Puerto Rican community and sent back to Puerto Rico, where producers such as Lunny Tunes and rappers such as Don Omar and Daddy Yankee began adding their own influence to Reggae en Español, mixing it with Hip Hop and the Latin styles of Salsa, Merengue, and Bachata. They named this new genre Reggaeton.

Musical Characteristics: Like Hip Hop, Reggaeton is created largely through sampling and other studio production techniques, although it is not unusual for producers to incorporate acoustic instruments as well. More than anything else, the defining musical feature of Reggaeton is the underlying beat, which can be traced back to the 1991 song “Dem Bow,” by Jamaican DJ/Vocalist Shabba Ranks. The sampled instrumental track in the song (known as a “Riddim” in Jamaica) has become the foundation of the Reggaeton sound.

Musical Activity: The “Dem Bow” rhythm is built between a snare drum and bass drum sound. When rehearsing the rhythm, try to use foot stomps and hand claps to approximate the bass drum/snare drum sound. Make the x notes claps and oval notes stomps. Be prepared to teach the rest of the class the rhythm.

Rhythm:

Count: 1 (2) + 3 4

Visualization: ●○○●○○○○

Vocalization: Boom-ch-boom-chick



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Cumbia

Region of Origin: Northern Colombia

Background: Cumbia can be traced back to the 1800s, when it was performed by African and Amerindian communities along the Caribbean Coast of Colombia. By the 1930s, Cumbia's popularity as a dance music spread throughout South America and the Caribbean, with traveling bands or *orquestas* and recording artists regularly incorporating Cumbias into their song repertoire.

Today, Cumbia remains one of the most popular music styles in Latin America. In countries like Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, it is considered a popular "tropical music," a category that also includes Salsa and Reggae. Countries such as Chile and Peru have mixed Cumbia with their own folkloric music to make hybrid styles. In Colombia, Cumbia has split into three major styles: the traditional version as it was played in the early 20th century; an electrified version that developed in the 1960s; and a version that is often performed by Salsa groups.

Cumbia traditionally served to accompany courtship dances, though as it spread throughout South America and the Caribbean, it adapted other kinds of dance styles. While instruments associated with Cumbia vary by region, percussion instruments remain essential. Common percussion instruments include various sized drums, shakers called *guache*, and the scraped metal *güira*. Today, it is just as common for these instruments to be digitally programmed on keyboards or computers as it is to have musicians play them.



Güira

Musical Characteristics: Like many Latin American music styles, Cumbia is defined by a collection of unique interlocking rhythms, often played by percussion instruments. These rhythms were thought to be quite complex early in the history of the music, but, as the style spread, some of the rhythms became more simplified.

Musical Activity: One of the simplest Cumbia rhythms to learn is the one typically performed on the *güira*. Try to clap the rhythm below, and be prepared to teach the rest of the class the rhythm:

Rhythm: Musical notation for the Cumbia rhythm in 4/4 time. The notation consists of a quarter note, followed by two eighth notes, a quarter note, another quarter note, and finally two eighth notes followed by a quarter note.

Count: 1 2 + 3 4 +

Visualization: ● ○ ● ● ● ○ ● ●

Vocalization: Cha-ch-ch cha-ch-ch

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Música Jíbara

Region of Origin: Rural Puerto Rico

Background: Música Jíbara refers not to a single genre, but a variety of musical practices performed by the *Jíbaros*, traditional farmers who often live in rural mountainous areas in Puerto Rico. The instruments most associated with Música Jíbara are a collection of hourglass-shaped lutes of various sizes, including the *tiple*, *tres*, *cuatro*, and *bordonúa*. Of these instruments, the *cuatro*, a small 10-string lute, has arguably become most representative of *Jíbaro* culture, if not Puerto Rico in general. Non-stringed instruments commonly associated with Música Jíbara include the *güiro*, a scraped percussion instrument, and *bongos*, a pair of two small drums. Today, the guitar is also a commonly used instrument in Música Jíbara.



Cuatro

Musical Characteristics: One of the most well-known styles associated with Música Jíbara is the *décima*. The *décima* is a style of sung poetry, and is one of the oldest musical traditions in Puerto Rico. The poetic form to a *décima* are usually based on the *espinela*, named after famous Spanish poet Vicente Gómez Martínez-Espinel. The *espinela* features

ten eight-syllable lines split into rhyming couplets, with a pause between the first four and second four lines. In performance, the singer/poet sings the lines, which are either composed beforehand or improvised, to an instrumental accompaniment provided by instruments such as the *cuatro*.

Musical Activity: Below is a traditional *décima* based on the *espinela* form. Look for the rhyming couplets in the poem, and label them alphabetically. To help, the first five lines have been already labeled. Once done, present to the class the rhyme scheme for the *espinela*, and try to read the poem as an example.

¡Décima, bella creación, (a)
 que a Martínez-Espinel (b)
 honraste con el laurel (b)
 de la inmortalización...! (a)

Encarnaste en Calderón (a)
 de la Barca, vida y sueño; ()
 rúbrica, enseña y diseño ()
 de Núñez de Arce y Cetina ()
 y la expresión más genuina ()
 del Jíbaro Borinqueño. ()



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Salsa

Region of Origin: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and The United States

Background: Like its namesake, Salsa (literally, “sauce”), is a mixture of musical styles from the United States and the Caribbean. The genre was first created in New York City in the 1960s, when Cuban and Puerto Rican musicians living in the city began mixing Jazz, Blues and Classical music with the folkloric musics of their own Caribbean homelands. The result was a new style that incorporated Cuban rhythms and percussion instruments with Puerto Rican song forms and Jazz melodies and harmonies.

Sensing Salsa’s potential to be a popular dance music, composer Johnny Pacheco and lawyer Jerry Masucci began the Fania label, to produce Salsa records. In 1968, the group created the Fania All-Stars, a touring Salsa “Supergroup” which included Rubén Blades, Willie Colón, Celia Cruz, and Héctor Leveo. Thanks in part to this group, Salsa became an international phenomenon, and grew to influence other popular musicians such as Carlos Santana, who mixed Salsa with Rock and Roll, and Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine, who mixed Salsa music with American Pop.



Timbales

Musical Characteristics: A large influence of Salsa music was the Cuban Son, a dance music that first developed among peasants in Eastern Cuba as far back as the 1700s. Many characteristics of Son, such as the rhythms and the call-and-response *montuno* section, are foundational to Salsa music.

One of the most important instruments of Salsa music that comes from Cuba is the *timbales*, a set of two drums with metal shells. Because the drums are naturally loud, they often serve as a way to give signals to the rest of the band. For instance, when a certain rhythm on the *timbales* is performed, the band moves on to another section of the song. When not signaling the band, the *timbales* player often plays Cuban Son rhythms on the sides of the drum, or on a woodblock, cowbell, or cymbal placed next to the drums.

Musical Activity: One of the simplest rhythms the *timbale* player might perform is on the cowbell, and is built by steady quarter notes. Rehearse this rhythm in your group, and be prepared to teach the rhythm to the rest of the class.

Rhythm:

Count: 1 2 3 4

Visualization: ● ○ ● ○ ● ○ ● ○

Vocalization: Ding ding ding ding