

Afro-Latin

The term Afro-Latin covers a huge variety of music, resulting from the combination of elements of African styles with the Spanish, Portuguese, and even French cultures transplanted to South and Central America. The blend was achieved earlier and more thoroughly than any such hybrid in North American music before the 1970s - indeed, watered-down South American music was being successfully exported to the USA (and Europe) from the time of the tango in the 1910s.

However, there were of course hints of African polyrhythms in ragtime and early New Orleans jazz, not to mention occasional borrowings from South American rhythms such as the habanera. So it was only to be expected that, by the 1930s jazzmen including Duke Ellington were becoming interested in new Latin imports like the rumba and that bands from those countries who settled in the USA began incorporating jazz-induced improvisation. In this way, the stage was set for the first real collaborations, joining the innovators of bebop such as Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker with the innovators of the mambo such as Machito.

For a while, progress in this direction was sporadic, but since the early 1960s, with the introduction of the bugalu (and its soft-core contemporary, the bossa nova), there has been a continuous interchange in the USA between jazz and Afro-Latin musicians. As with any fusion, the lowest common denominator often seems to predominate but it's increasingly the case that the creative performers who have emerged on each side have real knowledge of both fields. What may be even more significant in the long run is that in the last three decades especially in Paris and London, musicians from Africa have been collaborating with players of a jazz/Afro-Latin background, and the latest fusions from various African countries have achieved some success in the USA.

Africa and Latin America are vast areas, and both still distinct regional styles in the way that North America used to before it became so homogenized. Possibilities for interaction are therefore endless and it has even been suggested that Latin jazz will eventually become the mainstream. John Storm Roberts's *The Latin Tinge* gives some idea of the ground covered so far. Latin Jazz (1930's - present)

Latin-influenced jazz is characterized by Latin dance rhythms combined with jazz melodies and chord progressions. Latin influences began to enter mainstream American popular music in the 1930's. During the 1950's and 1960's these influences became particularly strong, with Latin dances such as the mambo, cha-cha-cha, samba, and bossa nova becoming extremely popular in the United States. Other Latin dances such as the salsa and merengue continue to be an influence today.

Latin music has its own unique sound. Eighth notes are played straight, not swung as in other style of jazz, but syncopation is still common. A wide variety of Latin percussion instruments also flavor the music. Congas are Afro-Cuban in origin, played with the palms of the hands and with the fingers. Bongos are also Afro-Cuban, but are higher-pitched and thinner in tone quality than congas. Other common instruments include timbales, claves, and cowbells.

Some bandleaders who infused a Latin element into their bands are Dizzy Gillespie and Stan Kenton. Other musicians who incorporate Latin elements into their music include Brazilian drummer Airto Moreira, Peruvian percussionist Alex Acuna, Cuban trumpeter, pianist, composer and protege of Dizzy Gillespie Arturo Sandoval, pianist Eddie Palmieri, percussionists Tito Puente and Poncho Sanchez, bandleader Mario Bauza, trombonist Steve Turre, and alto saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera.

Did you know?

* Popular musicians Arturo Sandoval (trumpet) and Paquito D'Rivera (alto saxophone) are both Cuban defectors.

* The bossa nova, a Brazilian beat, was popularized in the United States by tenor saxophonist Stan Getz.