

Clave is a rhythmic structure which underlies much of the music of west africa and the americas. Aspects of the clave rhythm can be heard in music around the world. Music based on clave rhythms is phrased medodically, rhythmically, and harmonically to fit within the clave pattern. Clave has many permutations and inflections, each of which share the following charachteristics:

- there is an underlying pulse which coincides with at least one (usually two) part(s) of the clave pattern.
- the clave pattern can be divided into two parts or *sides*; a measure of three notes and a measure of two notes

3:2 son clave with pulse

the 3:2 indicates that the side of clave pattern containing three notes is first, followed by the two note pattern. Son refers to the cuban music style son, which uses this pattern as its basis.

2:3 Son clave with pulse

The 2:3 indicates that the side of the clave pattern containing two notes is first, followed by the three note pattern. 2:3 clave is standard for much contemporary salsa music

The following examples show how melody and clave work together. The first is a standard "call" or introduction in rumba music. The second is a melody by Juan Formell of the cuban group "los Van Van"

The clave pattern has its roots in west african religious music, where it is felt in a 6/8 meter. Clave in 6/8 is usually phrased 3:2 as shown below. The clave pattern and pulse can float between duple and triple beat subdivisions as well as a pulse felt in 2 and 3 parts. Mastering this rhythmic malleability can attune the ear to the rhythmic subtleties of many musical forms. Carefully study how these 6/8 clave rhythms sound with duple and triple pulses.

6/8 clave with duple pulse **6/8 clave with triple pulse**

The image shows two musical staves in 6/8 time. The first staff is titled '6/8 clave with duple pulse' and shows a melody of eighth notes and a bass line of dotted half notes. The second staff is titled '6/8 clave with triple pulse' and shows a melody of eighth notes and a bass line of eighth notes.

Another layer of syncopation is introduced with *rumba* clave. The final note of the three side in rumba clave is displaced by a half beat. This displacement smooths the sound of the rhythm. In percussion based music of west africa and the caribbean several percussionists must lock together with an incredible degree of rhythmic accuracy. Feeling these rumba clave rhythms sheds light on rhythmic interpretations in any musical style.

3:2 rumba clave **2:3 rumba clave**

The image shows two musical staves in common time (C). The first staff is titled '3:2 rumba clave' and shows a melody with a syncopated eighth note and a bass line of quarter notes. The second staff is titled '2:3 rumba clave' and shows a melody with a syncopated eighth note and a bass line of quarter notes.

3:2 rumba clave in 6/8 with duple pulse **3:2 rumba clave in 6/8 with triple pulse**

The image shows two musical staves in 6/8 time. The first staff is titled '3:2 rumba clave in 6/8 with duple pulse' and shows a melody with a syncopated eighth note and a bass line of dotted half notes. The second staff is titled '3:2 rumba clave in 6/8 with triple pulse' and shows a melody with a syncopated eighth note and a bass line of eighth notes.

There are many ornamentations of the basic clave rhythms. These variations are sometimes called "cascara" or "bell patterns" after the instruments on which they are played. Here are five variations on 6/8 clave

The image shows five musical staves in 6/8 time, each representing a different variation of the basic clave rhythm. The variations include different combinations of eighth notes, quarter notes, and dotted half notes in both the melody and bass lines.

Here are four cascara or bell patterns in 4/4. Each pattern is associated with a particular style of cuban music. The clave associated with each is notated below.

Mozambique

Guaguanco

Mambo

Son-Montuno

The clave pattern does not have a downbeat. It is a rhythmic pattern which we approximate using notation. We have already seen how the clave's own syncopations work with a pulse and some ornamental bell patterns. The following example shows the most basic of a wide variety of bass patterns used with clave in cuban music. Note how the tumbao matches the three side of the clave but is syncopated with the two side.. This accent on the and of two is called the bombo. The tumbao's emphasis of beat four, along with 2:3 clave's lack of a downbeat further obscures beat one while maintaining a strong groove. The tumbao pattern still emphasises the bombo beat and beat four in 3:2 and rumba clave patterns. The tumbao is not generally played in 6/8 rhythms.

Tumbao with 2:3 son montuno and pulse

The versatility of the clave pattern and its related rhythms reflects and informs our study of the greater world of music, including classical forms. Its roots in sacred music speak to the spiritual power of music, rhythm, and syncopation.

Here are some extensions of clave, showing its usefulness in myriad rhythmic situations.

6/8 rumba clave with displaced pulse

Musical notation for 6/8 rumba clave with displaced pulse. The notation consists of two staves. The top staff is in 6/8 time and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with stems pointing down, starting on a quarter rest. The bottom staff is in 6/8 time and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with stems pointing up, starting on a quarter rest. Both staves end with a double bar line and a 5/4 time signature.

5/4 clave and pulse with a 2:3 son feel

Musical notation for 5/4 clave and pulse with a 2:3 son feel. The notation consists of two staves. The top staff is in 5/4 time and contains a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes with stems pointing up, starting on a quarter rest. The bottom staff is in 5/4 time and contains a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes with stems pointing down, starting on a quarter rest. Both staves end with a double bar line and a 6/8 time signature.

rumba clave with a seven beat pulse

Musical notation for rumba clave with a seven beat pulse. The notation consists of two staves. The top staff is in 6/8 time and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with stems pointing down, starting on a quarter rest. The bottom staff is in 6/8 time and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with stems pointing up, starting on a quarter rest. Both staves end with a double bar line and a 9/8 time signature.

"Brazilian clave"

And finally, some brazilian rhythms, all of which use a duple pulse

Musical notation for Brazilian rhythms. The notation consists of a single staff in common time (C) containing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes with stems pointing down, starting on a quarter rest. The notation ends with a double bar line.

Partido Alto 1

Partido Alto 2

Musical notation for Partido Alto 1 and Partido Alto 2. The notation consists of a single staff in common time (C) containing a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes with stems pointing down, starting on a quarter rest. The notation ends with a double bar line.