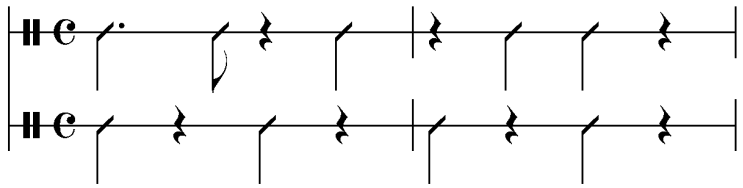
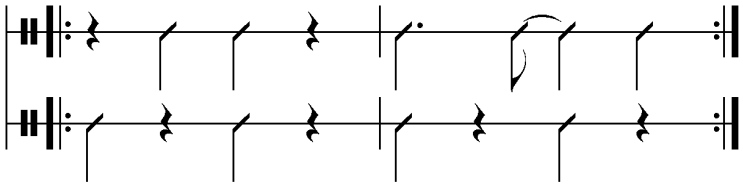
Clave is a rhythmic structure which underlies much of the music of west africa and the americas. Aspects of the clave rhythm can be heard in music around the world. Music based on clave rhythms is phrased medodically, rhytmically, and harmonically to fit within the clave pattern. Clave has many permutations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



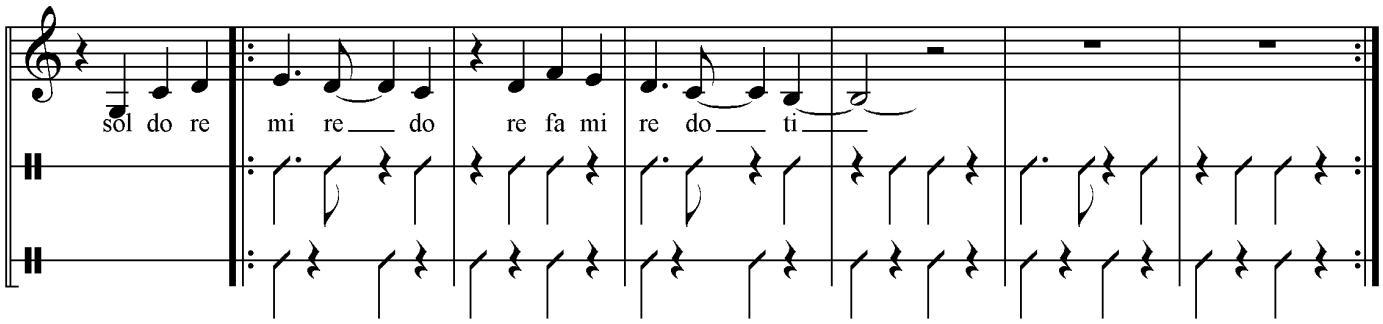
the 3:2 indicates that the side of clave pattern containing three notes is first, followed by the two note pattern. Son refers to the cuban music style son, which uses this pattern as its basis.

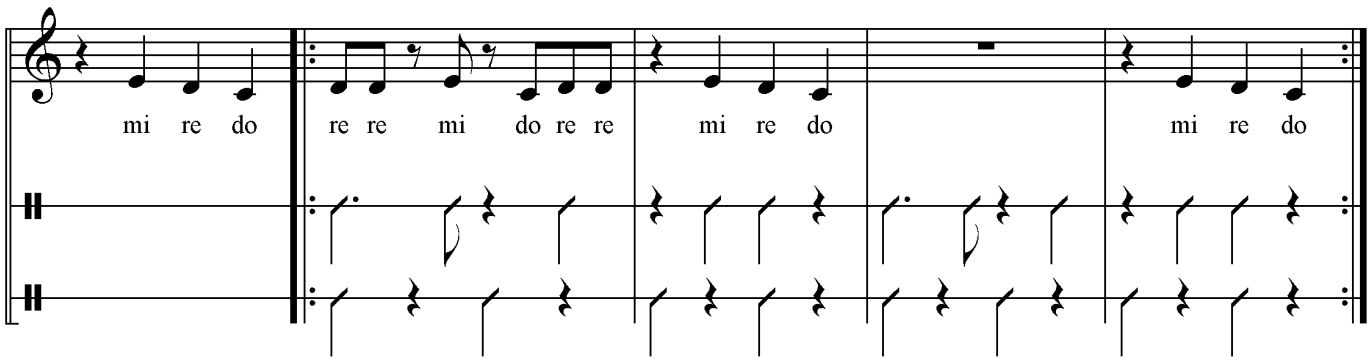
2:3 Son clave with pulse



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

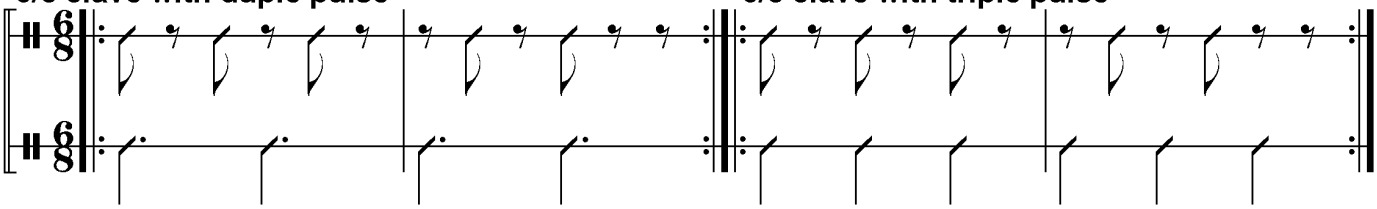
The following examples show how melody and clave work together. The first is is a standard "call" or introduction in rumba music. The second is a melody by Juan Formell of the cuban group "los Van Van"





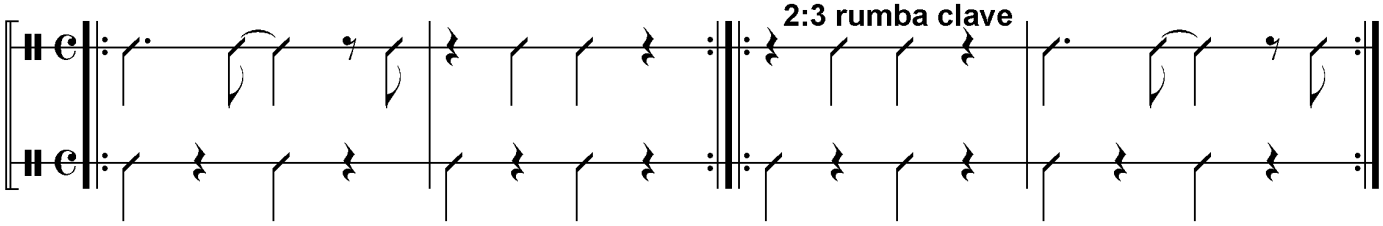
The clave pattern has its roots in west african religious music, where it is felt in a 6/8 meter. Clave in 6/8 is usually phrased 3:2 as shown below.The clave pattern and pulse can float between duple and triple beat subdivisions as well as a pulse felt in 2 and 3 parts. Mastering this rhythmic malleability 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**

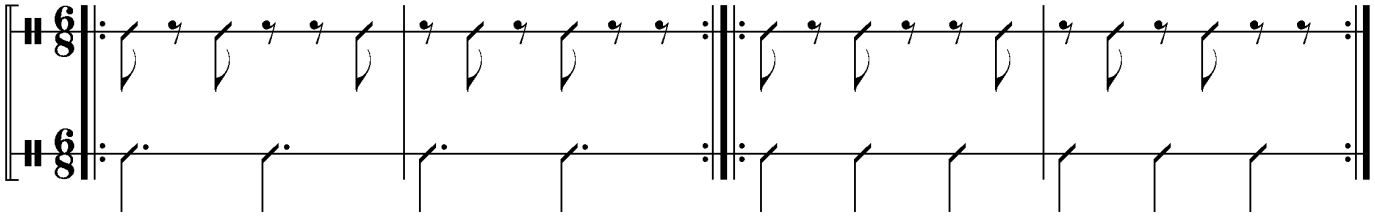


Another layer of syncopation is introduced with *rumba* clave. The final note of the three side in rumba clave is displaced by a half beat. This displacement smooths the sound of the rhythm. In percussion based music of west africa and the caribbean several percussionists must lock together with an incredible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

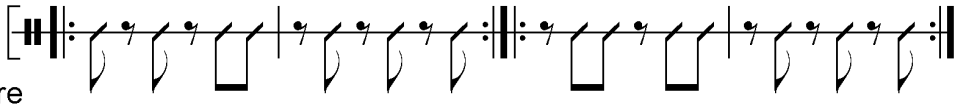
3:2 rumba clave **2:3 rumba clave**

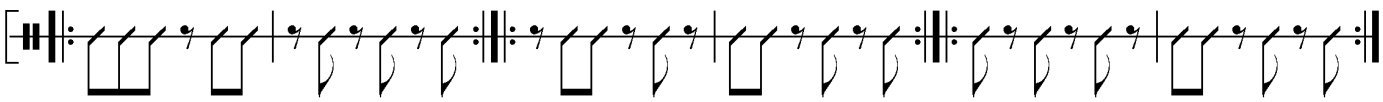


3:2 rumba clave in 6/8 with duple pulse 3:2 rumba clave in 6/8 with triple pulse



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





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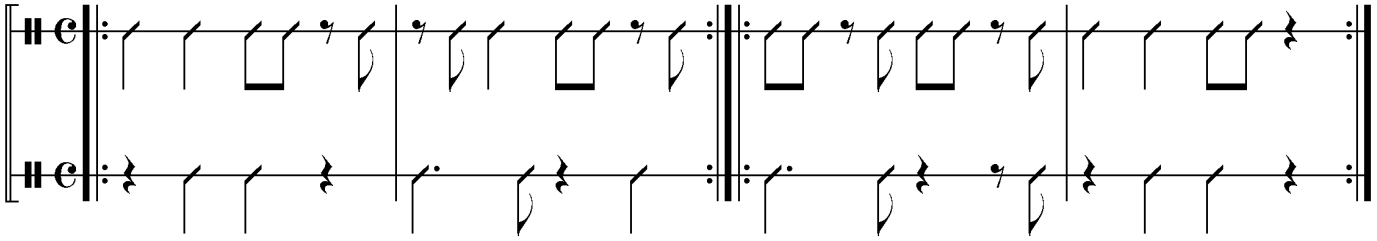
Here are four cascara or bell patterns in 4/4. Each pattern is associated with a particular style of cuban music. The clave associated with each is notated below.

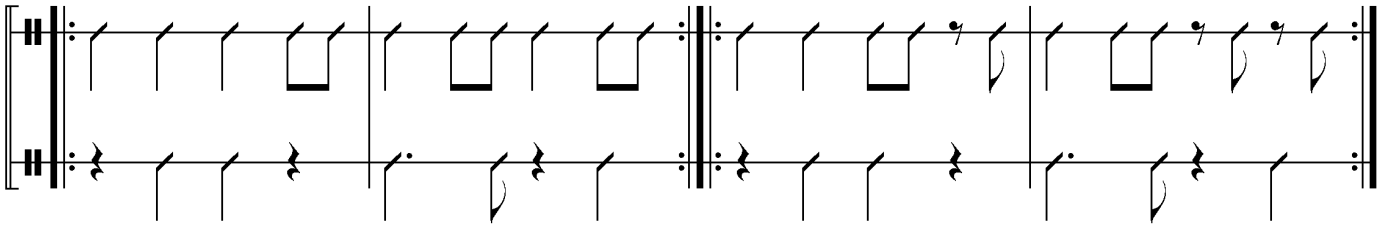
Mozambique

Guaguanco



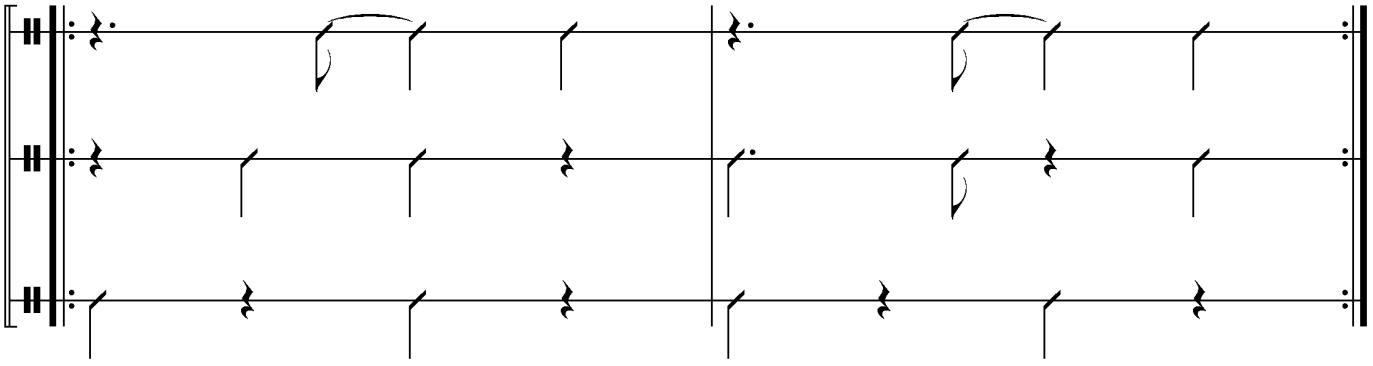
Mambo

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



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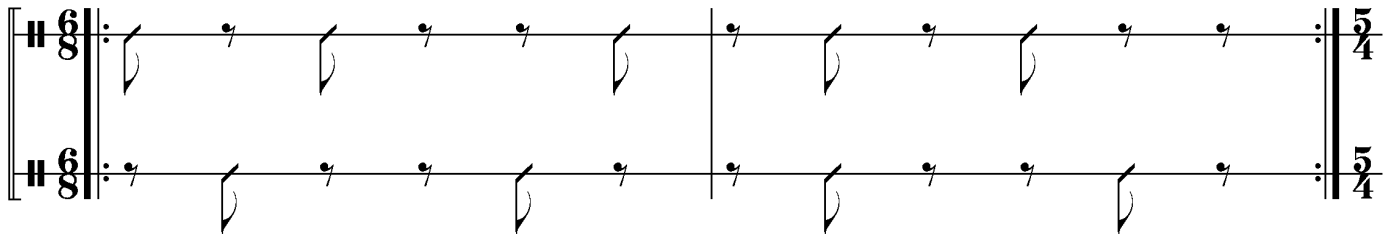
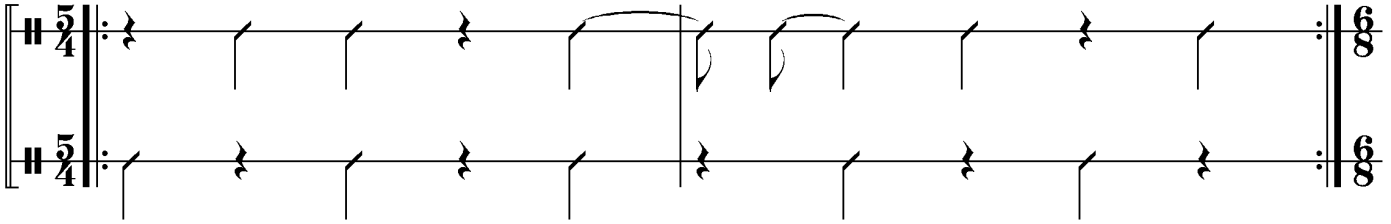
The versatility of the clave pattern and its related rhythms reflects and informs our study of the greater world of music, including classical forms. Its roots in sacred music speak to the spiritual power of music, rhythm, and syncopation.
Here are some externsions of clave, showing its usefulness in myriad rhythmic situations.

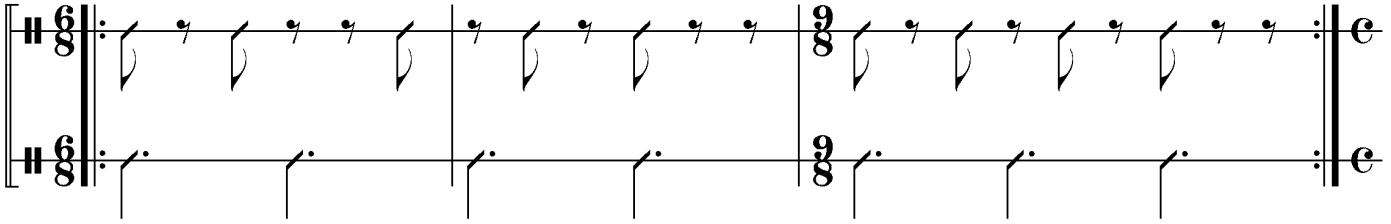
6/8 rumba clave with displaced pulse



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

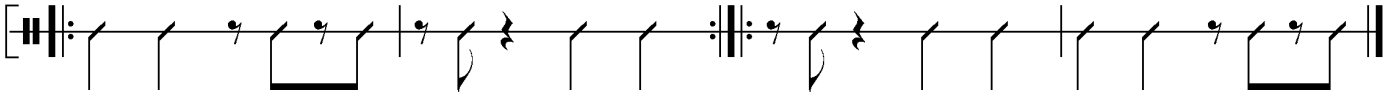


rumba clave with a seven beat pulse



"Brazilian clave"

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

Partido Alto 1

Partido Alto 2