

Horsing Around with Cumbia

DDemnitz

Gaitero music is one of two original styles of Cumbia, the music of the coastal region of Colombia. Gaitero music is a beautiful combination of indigenous, African, and European elements and all the elements are still in their original forms and are easily discernable. It is, in this original form, played with two flutes, or gaitas, and one of the flute players also plays a maraca and sings. The flutists are accompanied by three drums, one playing a hypnotic beat. The haunting melodic lines show the influence of Spanish music, the flutes and maracas are indigenous, the drums are African. The African drumming saves the Cumbia from the overly noble tendencies of much of Andean folk music. The combination of the drumming and the maraca creates a kind of charming, horsey rhythm. This early form of the music dates back to Simon de Bolivar and the continental struggle for independence from Spain in the early eighteenth century.

The music evolved as it moved from the country toward the city; accordions, harps and organs became part of the still hypnotic, haunting sound. The maraca rhythm came to be played on scrapers. Another urban tendency resulted in Big Band Cumbia, and the word is now associated with Polka style dance music. Cumbia is one of the best known Latin American styles.

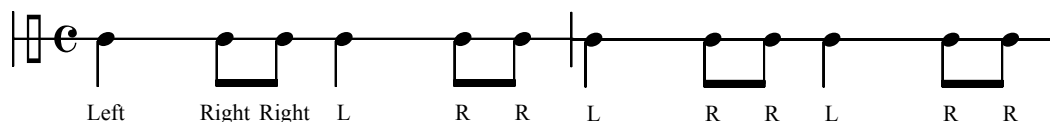
This activity includes a melody which is in two sections, the first of which is made of the same notes as the bass pattern, 3 notes in all! That way, the correspondence between the notes of the melody and bass pattern is demonstrated, and if you can find the notes in the bass pattern, you've already found the notes in the melody. The melodic sections impart a sense of development to the song, even though the accompaniment is made of two chords which alternate throughout the activity. This is also a good opportunity to teach maraca and scraper technique.

La Cumbia (de Colombia)

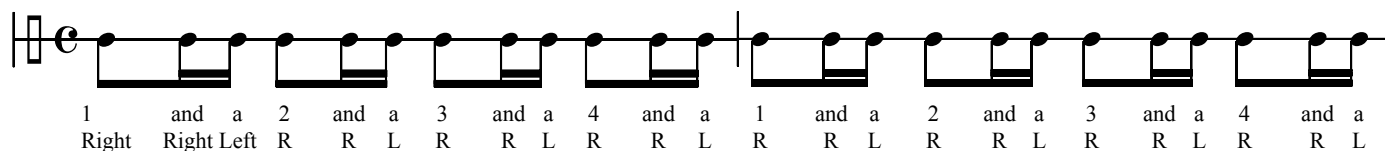
Time: One class period.

Materials: Musical instruments. Scrapers (guiros, sand blocks, etc.) and maracas (any kind of rattles in pairs) are a must.

1. Give some background to acquaint students with Colombia and Cumbia.
2. Play and sing the song for students.
3. Ask students to identify keys B, E and A on keyboards by looking at the black notes.
4. Have students count to four and play the rhythm of the bass pattern on their thighs, playing beats one and three on their left thigh and the 'two and' and 'four and' on their right thigh. Tell students they should do it like this because they're preparing to play the bass part on keyboards, and the keyboards don't care which is your dominant hand :



5. Ask students to play the maraca rhythm by slapping their thighs. Students should count "1 and-a 2 and-a 3 and-a 4 and-a". On the eighth notes, they should slap their thigh with their dominant hand, and on the sixteenth note they should slap with their other hand. Start with the eighth notes, played with one hand, then add the sixteenth notes. Show this.



6. Point out that the maraca rhythm is the same as the bass rhythm, only twice as fast. Demonstrate the relationship between the bass rhythm and the maraca rhythm by dividing the class into two groups, one of which will say 'cumbia' to the maraca rhythm, and the other saying 'cumbia' twice as slow in the bass rhythm. (The bass rhythm, if played twice yet again slower, is a Bolero or what is often called a rhumba rhythm, as in "I Just Called to Say I Love You" by Stevie Wonder.

7. Now switch rhythms, so each group gets to play each rhythm.

8. Review the song, and have the students sing it as they play their rhythms.

9. Prepare students to play scraper by having them scrape their non-dominant hand with their dominant hand. First, play the eighth notes, all with downstrokes. Most of the movement is made with the dominant hand. Now add the sixteenth notes by scraping upwards so:

1: Down Down Down Down Down Down Down Down

2: Down D Up D D U D D U D D U

10. Show students how to play maracas and scraper. To play maracas, the dominant hand (the right hand in most cases) keeps a steady eighth note beat, accenting the offbeats. Much of the movement is in the wrist, and the movement should be sharp in order to get a clean, percussive sound. After they can do this with one hand, add the 16th note with the other hand so:

(For right handed people)

1: Right R R R R R R R R

2: Right Right Left R R L R R L R R L

When playing scraper, the eighth notes are down strokes, and the sixteenth note is an upstroke. Again, the offbeat eighth notes should be accented. Practice this with all downstrokes on the eighth notes as slow as necessary at first, then add the sixteenth notes and speed up to tempo (this song should not be played fast).

11. Assign instruments. Students will play the bass part (they can play it in any octaves in order to be able to share keyboards), maracas and scrapers. Keyboard players should locate the notes they need, and practice their part. Maraca and scraper players should play the eighth notes first, with their dominant hand for maracas and downstrokes for scrapers, and then add the sixteenth notes. Have them practice these instruments slowly and only speed to tempo when they can play the instruments musically.

12. Get the scraper and maraca players going and when they can keep the beat, add the bass part. When they're ready, you play the chords and sing the song. If you have to, play the chords on the beat at first, then shift them off the beat, and explain what you're doing if they get disoriented.

13. Add a simple conga part and cowbell part. The cowbell and clave can play on the quarter notes and the conga and timbales and bongos and so forth can play like the bass part: *low, high high, low, high, high, etc.*

Cowbell/Claves Low High High L H H L H H L H H

Conga/Bongo Low High High L H H L H H L H H

14. Divide the class so you have bass players, vocalists, and percussionists. Rehearse and perform the song (you play the chords unless a precocious student can play them), then switch students around to give everyone a chance to do everything. Later, you can teach students to play the melody

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Tenor

It's the Cum bi a de Col - om - bi - a It's the

Piano

Scraper

(Cum - bi-a cum - bi-a cum - bi-a cum - bi-a)

T

Cum - bi - a de Co - lom - bi - a We

Pno.

Scraper

Fine

Fine

Fine

6
8

T
laugh and sing all day long be - cause we play Cum-bi - a We

Pno.

6

Scrapper

10
8

T
laugh andsing all day long be - cause we sing Cum-bi - a It's the -

Pno.

10

Scrapper

D.C. al Fine

D.C. al Fine

D.C. al Fine

D.C. al Fine