



# *The U.S. Army School of Music Presents*

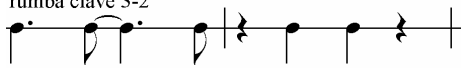
## *The Claves*

*by SSG Gerardo ColónOrtiz*

The Clave is one of the most important elements in Afro-Latin Caribbean music. It is a two-bar rhythmic ostinato pattern, grouped either 3-2 or 2-3 that governs how the rest of the instruments in an ensemble play.

Whereas in most popular music the rhythmic pulse is on either beats 1 & 3 or 2 & 4, in Latin music clave is the pulse. The clave used today is either “rumba/guaguanco” or “son” clave. Note that the difference is in beat 4 of the measure with the “3” grouping: in rumba clave it falls on the “and” of beat 4, while in son clave it falls on beat 4.

rumba clave 3-2



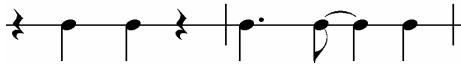
rumba clave 2-3



son clave 3-2



son clave 2-3



The melody will usually determine whether the rhythmic pulse of a tune should be 3-2 or 2-3 clave. The more you listen to and play Latin music, the better you will understand what “side” of the clave fits any given tune best. This determination affects everything the ensemble plays, including the rhythm section, horns, lead vocals and chorus, and soloists. And don’t forget about the dancers—if the groove is “in clave” they’ll be out on the floor! When rhythms within the ensemble are poorly phrased or contradict the clave, they are described as “cruzao,” or crossed.

Next time we’ll explore how the bass player builds his or her part on the clave foundation. Until then just remember the bottom line:

“La clave es la llave!” — “Clave is the key!”