

## Handout 2 - Santana and Afro-Cuban Rock

Before slavery was abolished there in 1886, Cuba, a Caribbean island roughly the size of Tennessee, became home to an estimated 600,000 enslaved West Africans. Unlike their Northern counterparts, the Spanish colonialists tolerated performances of the traditional music and dance of the people they enslaved, allowing gatherings to maintain some West African traditions on days of rest. Due to a lack of Spanish performers on the island, enslaved people were also compelled to learn and perform Spanish dance music. Letters from the era indicate that some Spanish quickly began to prefer the African style of performance, even of Spanish music. Thus, “Afro-Cuban” music reflects deep influences of both West African and Spanish music traditions.

Afro-Cuban music entered the U.S. first in the mid-19th century. Its influence is felt in the earliest of jazz styles, and it became popular on a larger scale via various Latin “dance crazes” of the 20th century. As the music became established in urban communities across the U.S., it took on a pan-Latino identity, absorbing influences from across the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. In New York City, immigrants from Puerto Rico and Cuba began to identify a shared, U.S.-based Latino culture as “Nuyorican.” However, when it comes to Latin music, many still suggest that the “Afro-Cuban” is the primary source.

Though Latin dances were popular in the first half of the 20th century, Latino people had scant representation in popular culture beyond stereotypes. At Woodstock, Santana foregrounded



Latin music, juxtaposing amplified versions of Afro-Cuban rhythms with rock guitar solos and situating centerstage the drums associated with Latin music.

In the photo to the left, Carlos Santana plays cowbell while both Jose “Chepito” Areas and Mike Carabello play congas, a set of hand drums essential to Cuban music. Drums such as the congas, including the much larger types used for communication, are common throughout West Africa. The interlocking, melodic rhythms Areas and Carabello create, as well as the metal-bell timeline Santana provides are hallmarks of West African and Cuban percussion ensembles.

Though also an aural and visual symbol of Afro-Cuban music, the timbales Jose Areas performed at Woodstock (pictured here) are related to the large timpani, or “kettle drums” used in European classical music.

