

# WORLD RHYTHMS

by Leo Traversa

Greetings bass players and rhythm section people worldwide. Today, I'd like to give you a little introduction to a subject that I love to talk about and that has been a big part of my career: World rhythms and how to make them groove on bass. Attention all you drummers, pianists and guitarists! Read on, because the principles that will help a bassist get inside the rhythm and groove are the same for all players, so let's get started.

In the beginning, there were drums. Well, maybe rocks or sticks, but the point is that the drum or percussion parts are the foundation of rhythmic styles, so it is extremely important to be familiar with the drum parts. When I say drum parts, I'm not only referring to the drum set but all percussion instruments too; congas, bongos, timbales, claves, surdos, tamborim, agogo bells, etc.

Remember that Latin, Brazilian, Caribbean and African grooves were originally played by percussionists in groups. Each style requires a few different parts put together to make up that particular rhythm. For example, in Latin music (Afro-Cuban, Salsa), the percussion group would include congas, timbales, a bongo player doubling on cowbell, guiro and maybe claves. In Brazilian music (Samba in particular) you'll have surdo, repenique, tamborim, ganza, caixa, agogo and cuica. Each instrument has its own part and it's the meshing of these parts that brings the rhythm to life and makes it feel good. When you add a rhythm section to these groups, your parts and their rhythms will become another interlocking piece of the puzzle. The more you know about the parts around you, the more you can lock in and make your own contribution to the groove.

Here are just a few examples. In Latin music, we all know the importance of the clave, the skeleton upon which the music is wrapped. If you want to get into world rhythms, it is extremely important to familiarize yourself with clave because it can be the foundation for many African, Caribbean, South American and, of course, Afro-Cuban rhythms. So, here is an example of a bass part derived from rhumba clave:



Example No.1

A7 sus4

Notice the notes that coincide

The following rhythm comes from cascara pattern, played on the side of a timbale or, on a drum kit, the side of the floor tom:

Example No.2

Here's a funky samba part called partido alto derived from the rhythm played by a cuica or agogo bells. Played with a drum set and a backbeat

this can be a real funky groove but it's core is all samba:



Example No.3



This samba part is based on the surdo drums, where a lot of Brazilian bass grooves come from:



Example No.4

Two staves of musical notation in 2/4 time. The top staff contains two measures: the first measure is labeled 'C Δ7' and the second 'G sus4'. The bottom staff also contains two measures, labeled 'C Δ7' and 'G sus4'. The notes are simple eighth and quarter notes.

See this example of an African style from Kongo, called soukous. In this section of the song, the snare drum plays a clave based groove while the guitars and bass play variations on the vamp. It's challenging to continue to improvise new grooves on the chords:

A single staff of musical notation in 4/4 time. It shows a sequence of notes and rests. Some notes have an 'x' above them, indicating a specific rhythmic pattern or improvisation. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes.

Example No.5

Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The top staff contains two measures: the first measure is labeled 'F' and the second 'Bb'. The bottom staff also contains two measures, labeled 'F' and 'C'. The notes are simple quarter and eighth notes.

An important consideration in all types of music is what kind of bass sound to use. In Latin music, the "baby bass" is very popular. It is an electric upright bass that has a dark, punchy sound with little sustain. It sounds great because it's percussive sound blends well with the band. I play a five string bass, so sometimes when I'm playing Latin music, I'll mute the strings with my palm and strike with my thumb to emulate a baby bass. In a

Brazilian setup, I still want some serious bottom but with a rounder tone and more clarity. In the soukous style, the bass really helps carry the groove and should stand out well with a fat sound and very little treble, especially on the high notes. Having the right sound is a very important element of being a solid bass player.

Another thing that I like to stress to students and aspiring professionals is the ability to create your own parts. Often times, in the real world, you don't have a written part. It's usually a lead sheet or just a chord chart (or maybe nothing) and you are expected, because of your familiarity with styles and rhythms, to play the right part. As bassists, we are the bridge between rhythm and harmony and if you can learn more about your fellow rhythm section players, drums, piano, percussion and guitar, you'll not only be able to come up with correct parts, but earth shaking, ground breaking parts that will shock and amaze the world (thanks Ali)! Also, when your playing world styles with only a drum set, you'll be able to give it a little extra kick by incorporating some percussion ideas into your groove.

So, keep your eyes and ears open. There's some great music being made in places all over the world and music has no borders. Get your passport!

*Leo*