

# BOSSA, MAMBO, SAMBA OR SONGO: WHAT TO PLAY WHEN THE DRUM CHART SAYS "LATIN"

PRESENTED BY  
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**Q** : If your drum chart says "Latin," what do you play?

**A** : It all depends.

Some drum charts — especially those that simply say "Latin" — can often be vague about the specific desired feel of the music or may in fact be a hybrid of styles. That's not a problem for an experienced drummer who can make intuitive and instantaneous musical decisions based on years of drumming experience. It doesn't however help the beginning or novice drummer (or jazz band director) figure out what to play. And yet, there may be clues somewhere on either the drum set or bass chart, that may give you an idea of what the composer (or arranger) had in mind.

In a Jazz or "World" music setting, there are three major categories of popular Latin-music — **Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Cuban and Afro-Caribbean**. All three of these categories also have several sub-categories of their own. Learning all the grooves from these categories would naturally take a very long time. So when you're just starting to feel your way around a drum chart, here's a good rule to keep in mind.

*When playing Latin music, the bass drum should always match or rhythmically support the bass player's basic rhythmic pattern.*

That said, are there any exceptions to this rule? Yes. But remembering this tip will help you avoid playing something that might conflict with the bass-line. Which is not a good thing when we are learning to play (or are teaching) a new type of music with other beginning and/or novice musicians.

Also keep in mind, unlike American Jazz and Rock & Roll music, the drum set — also invented in America — was not an original instrument in any of the traditional "Latin" ensembles from the above mentioned categories. Contemporary Latin grooves for drum set are adapted from percussion patterns (both rhythmic and pitched) played by multiple percussion instruments in traditional or folkloric ensembles. The examples on the following pages are basic Latin grooves that every drummer should have in his or her repertoire. If played confidently, and with the proper feel (and appropriate bass line), you'll create a rock-solid foundation for your band to build upon.

## FOR THE FIRST-TIME READER

When reading a drum exercise for the first time, the notation may look very complicated, even though the individual rhythms themselves may be simple. Our first Latin example is a basic Bossa Nova. If you have never seen it written before, it might *look* more difficult than it actually sounds. If you have trouble coordinating all three parts (hi-hat with your right hand, a "cross-stick" with your left hand on the snare drum and bass drum with your right foot) at the same time, practice the next two-line examples (HH and BD only then HH and SD only) for as long as you need, to get it sounding good with the correct feel. Then put all three parts together and practice them with a metronome *and* a real live bass player, when possible. Use this technique whenever necessary to learn a multi-lined drum set pattern.

## AFRO-BRAZILIAN

### BOSSA NOVA

♩ = approx. 132

Drum notation for Bossa Nova. The notation is on a three-line staff with three parts: HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The time signature is common time (C). The HH part consists of a series of 'x' marks on the top line, indicating hi-hat patterns. The SD part consists of a series of dots on the middle line, indicating snare drum patterns. The BD part consists of a series of dots on the bottom line, indicating bass drum patterns. The notation is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines.

#### Hi-Hat and Bass Drum Only

Drum notation for Hi-Hat and Bass Drum Only. The notation is on a three-line staff with two parts: HH (Hi-Hat) and BD (Bass Drum). The HH part consists of a series of 'x' marks on the top line. The BD part consists of a series of dots on the bottom line. The notation is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines.

#### Hi-Hat and Snare Drum Only

Drum notation for Hi-Hat and Snare Drum Only. The notation is on a three-line staff with two parts: HH (Hi-Hat) and SD (Snare Drum). The HH part consists of a series of 'x' marks on the top line. The SD part consists of a series of dots on the middle line. The notation is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines.

(Cross Stick)

## AFRO-BRAZILIAN CONT.

### SAMBA

Our first Samba pattern for drum set is technically a very simple combination of hi-hat (with both hands alternating — R, L, R, L etc.) and bass drum. But played with the right feel you can convey a very convincing Samba groove. The hi-hat should be played lightly and with precision — suggesting a pandeiro (Brazilian tambourine) or a large shaker. The bass drum, played with a half-time emphasis, assumes the roll of the Surdo drum — the lowest percussion voice in a traditional Samba band. The “o” notation means open hi-hat. The “+” means closed. The notes within the in parenthesis, are intended to be played with less emphasis — “ghosted”.

♩ = approx. 188

HH  
BD

The next Samba example takes your alternating hands down to the snare drum for a more parade style. Again, the repeating eighth notes should be played very lightly, almost ghosting the notes that aren't being accented. The hi-hat is now being closed with your left foot on beats 2 and 4. Finally, a fat buzz is played by the left hand on the snare and a low-tom hit on beat 3 will help emphasize the desired half-time feel.

SD  
FT BD  
HH w/foot

Like the Bossa Nova exercise on the previous page, practice this groove one line at a time, then add parts as it begins to flow. Advanced students can experiment with varying degrees of “open” flams on beat 3 between the snare and low-tom for a looser feel. Also, try splashing the hi-hat with your left foot on beat 2 instead of closing it.

## AFRO-BRAZILIAN CONT.

### MORE SAMBAS

The following two patterns are also Sambas. Instead of being built on a single surdo part, these patterns support styles that have two-voice or "split" surdo part. Even if you never play a song that calls for a proper Partido Alto or Samba Reggae (pronounced Samba Heg-ay in Portuguese), these grooves are excellent patterns to start a solo when playing in the style.

### PARTIDO ALTO

In this example, the unique split surdo rhythm of the Partido Alto is supported by the snare and bass drums. Your right hand hi-hat continues to emulate the pandeiro.

Musical notation for Partido Alto drum pattern. The notation is on a single staff with three parts: HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The HH part has a series of 'x' marks above the staff, indicating a steady eighth-note pattern. The SD and BD parts have notes and rests, with some notes marked with a '+' sign above them, indicating a specific rhythmic pattern.

### SAMBA REGGAE

Often played at a medium/slow tempo, Samba Reggae combines a snare and tom pattern to reflect the style. The snare part (with a buzz on beat 1) is played with the left hand. The "Hi-Lo" tom part is played with the right. Have fun!

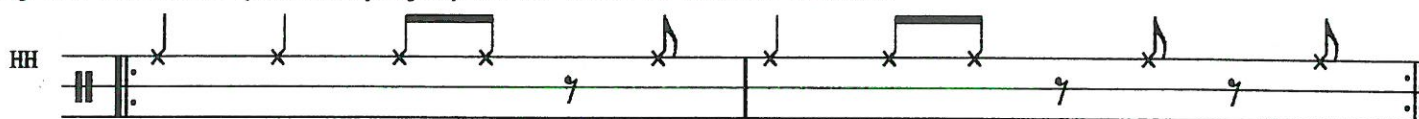
Musical notation for Samba Reggae drum pattern. The notation is on a single staff with four parts: TT (Tom-Tom), SD (Snare Drum), FT (Foot), and HH W/FOOT (Hi-Hat with Foot). The TT part has notes and rests, with some notes marked with a 'z' above them. The SD and FT parts have notes and rests. The HH W/FOOT part has 'x' marks above the staff, indicating a steady eighth-note pattern.

## AFRO-CUBAN

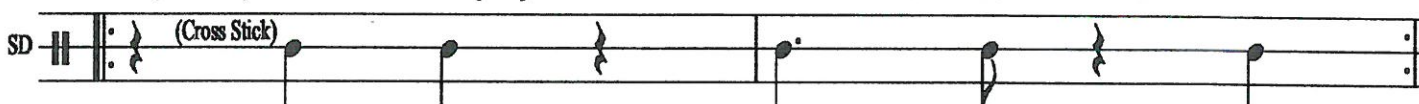
### MAMBO

Although all of the basic Latin rhythms can be traced to ancient Africa, the particular combination of rhythms that make up the Mambo come to us from Cuba. Like the Samba pattern for drum set, the following Mambo pattern incorporates traditional rhythms as well as the pitch range that suggest the instrument to which the rhythms are attributed. The three rhythms are:

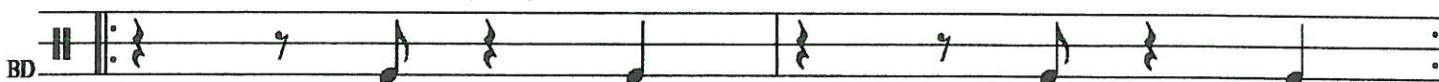
- *Cascara* — played with the right hand on the closed hi-hat to simulate the pattern played by the timbalero (timbale player) on the shell of his/her timbale.



- *Reverse (or 2/3) Son Clave* — played with a cross stick on the snare.

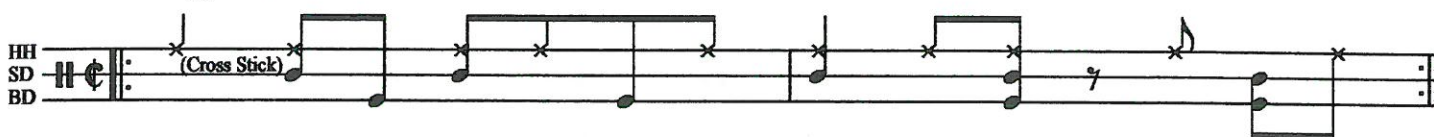


- *Tum-Bao* — The bass drum pattern duplicates the rhythm of the bass player's part on the "and" of 2 (and) 4.

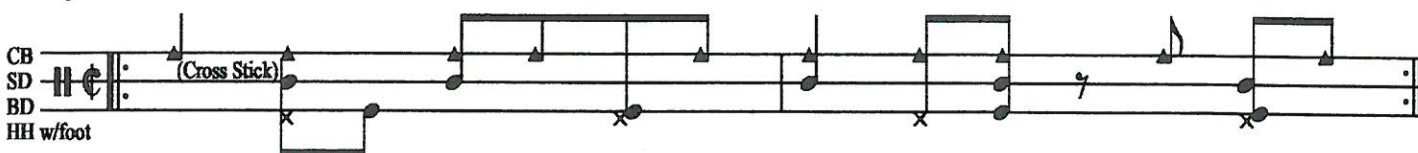


Together, all three parts look like this:

♩ = approx. 200



Now move your right hand from the hi-hat to a small cowbell or the bell of your ride. Continue the Cascara pattern on the bell with your right hand and add the hi-hat on 2 and 4 with your left foot. Go slow and have fun.



## AFRO-CUBAN CONT.

### SONGO

When lecturing in front of young drummers, I'm often asked to describe and/or demonstrate a Songo. I think people just like saying the word: *Songo!* See, it's fun. Anyway, Songo is a modern style based on Reverse (or 2/3) *Rumba Clave*. One Songo that I like to play has a low-bell on 1 and 3 (in cut-time) while the bass drum plays Tum-Bao. I've even heard the bass simply played on the "and" of 2 only. You experiment and continue to have a good time.

♩ = approx. 222

CB  
SD  
BD  
HH w/fcct

### CHA CHA CHA

Like Mambo, the Cha Cha Cha or Cha Cha, as it's commonly referred to, is both the name of a dance *and* a musical style from Cuba. Once again, our drum set parts are simply suggesting the sounds and rhythms of the percussion instruments heard in a traditional Cuban ensemble.

The hi-hat — played with the left hand in this example — mimics the sound of the guiro, with its "long-short-short, long-short-short" sound. The quarter note pulse — characteristic of the Cha Cha — is played on a bell with the right hand. The basic bass drum pattern is on beats 1, 3 and 4. Depending on which rhythm the bass player is playing, you can also employ a modified Tum-Bao rhythm (see Mambo). As before, practice them two limbs at a time at first.

♩ = approx. 112

HH  
CB  
BD

## AFRO-CARIBBEAN

### SOCA (SOUL-CALYPSO)

In the early 1950's — after the US Military had littered the island of Trinidad with 55-gallon steel barrels — the locals began to experiment with the empty barrels as musical instruments. With Calypso as their traditional music at the time, and the inevitable influence of other western music styles (most notably, American Soul), the new music of the region was dubbed *Soul-Calypso*. Later shortened to Soca.

This first example is recognized as a basic, traditional Soca pattern. You can play the written HH part or simply play the HH on all four quarter notes — opening it on 2 and 4.

### SOCA #1

Musical notation for SOCA #1. It shows a four-measure pattern on a grand staff with three staves: HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The HH part has a '+' above the first measure and an 'o' above the second measure of each measure. The SD part has a 'H' above the first measure. The BD part has an 'x' above the first measure of each measure. The pattern is: HH (x) SD (H) BD (x) | HH (x) SD (H) BD (x) | HH (x) SD (H) BD (x) | HH (x) SD (H) BD (x).

Just like the Partido Alto and Samba Reggae grooves are fun alternatives to a traditional Samba (when dictated by the appropriate bass line), the following two patterns are alternate grooves that will support a traditional Soca.

This one-bar pattern has the HH written on 1 and 3 only. The snare drum part should be played with a cross-stick on the SD or on a small bell.

### SOCA #2

Musical notation for SOCA #2. It shows a one-measure pattern on a grand staff with three staves: HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The HH part has an 'o' above the first measure. The SD part has an 'H' above the first measure. The BD part has an 'x' above the first measure. The pattern is: HH (o) SD (H) BD (x).

This final pattern accompanies a popular Soca bass line that is played on beats 3 and 4 only. That particular bass line might not get played in your high school jazz band, but it's a very cool groove that gives the feeling of turning the beat around. Use it wisely!

### SOCA #3

Musical notation for SOCA #3. It shows a four-measure pattern on a grand staff with three staves: HH (Hi-Hat), SD (Snare Drum), and BD (Bass Drum). The HH part has a '+' above the first measure and an 'o' above the second measure of each measure. The SD part has a 'H' above the first measure. The BD part has an 'x' above the first measure of each measure. The pattern is: HH (x) SD (H) BD (x) | HH (x) SD (H) BD (x) | HH (x) SD (H) BD (x) | HH (x) SD (H) BD (x).

## ABOUT MATT JOHNSON

Considered one of Southern California's most versatile drummers, *The Los Angeles Times* proclaimed Matt Johnson "a hurricane on sticks!"

Best known for his jazz stylings, Johnson is equally versed in all forms of pop drumming and has performed with a range of entertainers from singers Julie Andrews and Andy Williams to Surf-rock pioneers Jan and Dean to big band legends Billy May and Les Brown. His extensive list of credits includes radio and television "jingles"; TV and film soundtracks; jazz recordings — as a sideman and leader — as well as countless live performances on national and international stages. Most recently, Johnson has been the driving-force behind the Atomic-Age lounge ensembles, the Jet Set Quintet [www.jetsetquintet.com](http://www.jetsetquintet.com).

*Modern Drummer Magazine* said Johnson possesses "captivating technique and creativity."

Johnson's talents don't lie in performance alone. He is also a gifted teacher who, since 1993, has worked to inspire the next generation of young drummers as part of the music faculty of Fullerton College [www.fullcoll.edu](http://www.fullcoll.edu) and the Idyllwild Arts Academy's Summer Jazz Camp [www.idyllwildarts.org](http://www.idyllwildarts.org). He is also an artist/clinician for Mapex Drums, Paiste Cymbals, Aquarian Drumheads and creative consultant to Forum Music Festivals [www.forumfestivals.com](http://www.forumfestivals.com).

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## LATIN BASS LINE EXAMPLES

### AFRO-BRAZILIAN

BOSSANOVA #1 BPM 120



SAMBA #1 BPM 148



SAMBA #2 BPM 188

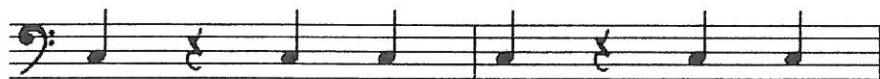


### AFRO-CUBAN

TUMBAO BPM 170



CHACHA1 BPM 106



CHACHA2 BPM 106



### AFRO-CARIBBEAN

SOCA BPM 190 (CALYPSO)



