

Learning about Rhythm in Salsa

Rhythm is a very important part of Salsa music. The rhythm fundamental to Salsa music is known as **SON CLAVE** (this rhythm came from **SON** music and is played by the **CLAVES**). There are two main variants, known as 2:3 and 3:2 shown below in staff notation and rhythm grid notation.



A musical staff with a 3:2 time signature. The first measure starts with a quarter note, followed by an eighth note, a sixteenth note, a eighth note, a sixteenth note, a eighth note, a sixteenth note, and a eighth note. The measure ends with a vertical bar line and a double bar line. The staff has a key signature of one sharp, indicated by a sharp sign and the letter F. A 4/4 time signature is written above the staff, and a 2/4 time signature is written below it, indicating a mixed time signature.



Based on Clave rhythm	1	+	2	+	3	+	4	+	5	+	6	+	7	+	8	+
3 – 2 clave rhythm	Yellow			Yellow			Yellow			Dark Blue		Dark Blue				
2 – 3 clave rhythm.			Dark Blue		Dark Blue				Yellow			Yellow		Yellow		



Scan the QR codes above to hear the 3:2 and 2:3 Son Clave rhythms being performed over a regular pulse. Try to focus on the **RHYTHM** rather than the regular beat and try and perform this on whatever instruments you have – even tapping it out on a table or desk. Perform “along with” the audio tracks at first and then try performing the different Son Clave rhythms without.

All other instruments in a Salsa band fit around this rhythm, which is commonly played for the duration of the chorus although often throughout the whole piece. A piece of Salsa music doesn't use the same **SON CLAVE** all the time – it may switch between the two. Salsa is normally in 4/4.

Another characteristic Salsa rhythm is often played by the piano. This is a highly **SYNCOPATED** four-bar rhythm, which the pianist will repeat as an **OSTINATO** or **RIFF** throughout the chorus of the piece. Here is an example of this rhythm based on the chord of F major.

A musical score for 'Piano' and 'Clave'. The 'Piano' part is in 4/4 time, treble clef, and consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth note chords. The 'Clave' part is in 2/4 time, common time, and consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. The score is on a single staff with a double bar line and repeat dots.



Scan the QR code and listen to the characteristic piano rhythm used in much Salsa music. You'll also hear the Clave rhythm being performed, in this case a 2:3 Son Clave rhythm.



If you have a keyboard available, try and learn the characteristic Salsa piano rhythm shown above. If you don't you may be able to use online "virtual pianos" or free music software or online sites or you may even be able to programme this into a music sequencing programme.

Scan the QR code and listen to a piece of Salsa focusing on the characteristic Salsa piano rhythm and the Son Clave rhythm.

