

Chapter 1

Introduction to Latin Styles

Getting to grips with syncopation

Playing Latin music styles is a pleasure for pianists all over the world, but for those who just want to really enjoy this music, they must be comfortable with syncopation. When playing Latin styles, the beats are often not on the downbeats. In order to master syncopation it is important to understand the difference between 'upbeats' and 'downbeats'.

All music has a pulse, as defined by the time signature. The time signature establishes the note value of each pulse, so that (for example) a bar of music in 4/4 time has four pulses (or beats), each of which is a quarter note ('crotchet' in the UK).

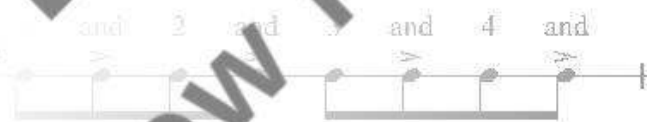
These beats are called the 'downbeats'. In simple time signatures the downbeats correspond to the clicks of the metronome or your foot-beats.

- a bar of music in 4/4 time has 4 downbeats
- a bar of music in 3/4 time has 3 downbeats
- a bar of music in 5/4 time has 5 downbeats

NB. In classical music, the term 'downbeat' usually refers to the first beat of the bar only, whereas in Latin music (and jazz) it refers to any note that is on the beat.

Notes in between downbeats are called 'upbeats'. If the downbeats are counted as 1, 2, 3, etc, then the upbeats are counted as 'ands' in between.

Fig. 1.1 Downbeats alternating with upbeats in a bar of 4/4 time.



In syncopated music, the downbeats generally receive greater emphasis, the first beat of every bar being the longest. Eighth-note syncopation occurs when this emphasis is displaced onto the upbeats, as accounted notes in the above example.

Eighth-note syncopation

To get used to finding and emphasizing the upbeats in a stream of eighth notes ('quavers' in the UK), try the following clapping exercises whilst looking at Fig 1.1:

- Say the numbers out loud and clap the 'and's
- Repeat for a few bars until you're comfortable with the rhythm
- Clap only on the 'and' after beats 2 and 4
- Clap only on the 'and' after beats 1 and 3
- Tap your foot on every downbeat, clap the 'and's as above

Our first piece *On The Upbeat* (overleaf) explores eighth-note syncopation in the right hand against a left hand which remains on the first and third downbeats of the bar.

CD1 1 ♩ = 100

On the Upbeat

Tim Richards

This simple twelve-bar tune in D minor incorporates eighth-note syncopation in the right-hand melody. The bass line uses only the Root and 5th of each chord, on the first and third downbeat of each bar. Tap your foot and make sure the left hand doesn't follow the right-hand syncopations.

Dm

Gm **Dm**

Em **A⁷** **Fine**

SOLO Improvisation solo and with chordal accompaniment

Dm **Gm** **Dm**

Em **A⁷** **Dm**

D.C. al Fine

Checkpoint *On the Upbeat*

- **Bass line** If you adopt the given fingering, you can cover all the notes you need with hardly any movement, which means you won't need to look at the left hand. Start the piece with your left little finger and thumb an octave apart (both on D), the middle finger on G (ready for bar 5).
- **Foot-tap** Set your metronome to 100 bpm and tap your foot in sync with it throughout. The left-hand bass notes must always coincide exactly with every other click.
- **Solo section** The 12-bar chord sequence of the melody repeats here, with left-hand chords as an alternative to the bass line. Practise both melody and solo over both types of left hand. When playing with a bass player, it is usually better to play chords in the left hand rather than doubling the bass line.

Assignments *On the Upbeat*

- 1. Melody** Practise the right hand alone, with a foot-tap, until you're sure you have mastered the syncopated rhythms. It's important that the foot-tap remains constant (to the number of the upbeats) to follow the right-hand upbeats.
- 2. Hands together** Slowly at first, put the hands together. You might want to practise the 12-bar section over and over before attempting to play the first 12 bars without stopping.
- 3. Chords in the left hand** Now play the melody with left-hand chords instead of the bass line, using the shapes given in bars 13–24. This is how it is played after the solo. Make sure all chords are all on the beat.
- 4. Improvisation** Try making up some syncopated rhythms and phrases to play over the solo section, with either the bass line or the chords in the left hand. Use the five notes given in the box, which form a minor pentatonic scale:

Fig 1.2 D minor pentatonic (five-note) scale



If these notes seem familiar, that's because the melody was based on this scale too! The A \flat and C \sharp in the melody are optional ornaments.

- 5. Play along** Having practised the melody and solo with your metronome, turn it off and try playing them at the same time as the bass line. Listen to the solo and work out some of the notes and phrases using the scale.

Improvisation

In this and other pieces in this book, we will sometimes suggest note choices for your solos, shown in a box. The arrows indicate that a rhythm is specified. You can play the notes in any order, any number of times, in any rhythm. You don't even have to use all of them – let your ears judge which sound best at any given point. The arrows indicate that the scale can be used over the whole 12-bar sequence, without changing any notes.

