

Merengue, Beguine And Bolero - History And Development Drummers Guide

Much like Bomba, Merengue traces its roots back to African slaves. Due to French occupation on the island (currently shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic), the music of the Dominican Republic combined African dance with the French Minuet resulting in the first forms of Merengue in the late 18th to early 19th centuries. Traditional Merengue instrumentation consisted of tambora, guira and accordion. After becoming established as the national dance in the 20th century, it made its way to the United States, primarily through New York City, in the 1950s. It is now a well established form of dance music throughout the world. The typical characteristic of a Merengue drum set pattern is the recurring floor tom figure (originally played on a conga drum) with noticeable use of the floor tom rim as well as a snare drum rim click throughout the patterns. The bass drum pattern is usually a "four on the floor" figure (frequently doubled by the hi hat foot). The Merengue is played at a very quick tempo starting around quarter note = 240 beats per minute.

First sung in Creole French, the Beguine developed as ballroom music on the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. The authentic Beguine found great international success in the late 1940s, though the most famous interpretation of it appeared in 1938 with Artie Shaw's immensely popular rendition of Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine." The authentic Beguine continued to thrive on the two islands until the 1970s, when Haitian immigrants emphasized their own dance music, which drew attention away from the Beguine. In addition to the Guadeloupean ballroom Beguine, there is one other primary form of the Beguine: the Martinican drum Beguine, which is more tribal or African folk oriented than the Guadeloupean Beguine. The more percussive instrumentation of the drum Beguine developed through the slaves and workers on the sugar plantations, while the orchestral Beguine uses the jazz instrumentation of piano, trombone, clarinet, bass, and drums. Tempos may range from as slow as quarter note = 112 beats per minute for ballroom dancing to as bright as quarter note 280 beats per minute for the drum Beguine.

The Cuban Bolero dates back over 200 years to Spanish folk dances of love and romance. The term "Bolero" stems from the Spanish verb "Volar," meaning "to fly," exemplified in the elegant moves of the dancers. Around the time that Afro Cuban musical styles matured, toward the end of the 19th century, Cuban composer Pepe Sanchez composed the first known Cuban Bolero, entitled Tristeza ("Sadness"). By the early 1900s, the immensely popular Bolero reached Mexico and Latin America, eventually gaining recognition in North America by the late 1920s. Additional significant Bolero composers include Guty Cdrdenas and Agustin Lara from the early 1900s and, more recently, Jose Feliciano. Boleros are a ballad style with slow tempos and sentimental lyrics. The signature Bolero rhythm, originally played with a pair of castanets, is now more commonly played by a pair of maracas. Because of this traditional instrumentation, the drum set player has to duplicate the familiar rhythmic sound with sticks, usually playing it on rims and or hi hat. The tempo range is slow at quarter note = 74-120 beats per minute.

About the Author

By Eric Starg. Like many Jazz drummers Eric is using [Tama Drums](#), [Meinl](#) cymbals and a few [African Drums](#) in his setup. Eric is an member of Drum Solo Artist where he is answering drum related questions, and helping drummers with tips and advices.

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