Basic Latin Styles for Drum Set

Below are some examples of popular salsa styles. I have included the conga and timbale parts to help you understand how the drum set part is built. With the exception of the songo, Latin drum set parts are derived from the percussion parts (often three or more players!) As with any style, it is very important that you listen to recordings or attend performances to understand the true feel of the music.

Tumbao

Tumbao is a standard time pattern used in many styles. Consider the basic eighth note rock pattern for drum set - it fits in many songs of many different styles - that's how tumbao works in Latin music.

This drum set pattern is built by: playing the conga part in the LH - slap on "2" and open tones on "4;" playing the cascara rhythm in the RH (this is performed on the timbales by playing on the sides of the drums); playing 3-2 son clave in the HH; and playing the bombo (it's like a bass drum) on the bass drum.

Another variation is to move the clave pattern to the LH (cross stick) and play downbeats or upbeats with the hi-hat. You could also add a bass drum note to beat 4.
Son Clave

Son Clave - clave can be performed two ways - 3-2 or 2-3. Once a song starts, it is very rare for the clave to change direction. If it does change direction, this is done by having a phrase with an odd number of measures.

3-2 Son Clave

2-3 Son Clave

Cha Cha Cha

Cha cha cha is a dance style with a heavy downbeat. Note that the conga part shows clave by playing the bombo note on the lower drum.

C. Dr.

Note that the drum set part uses elements of the conga part and the 2-3 son clave pattern in the LH. The RH plays the bongo bell pattern while the BD plays the bombo note. The HH can be slashed on 1 and 3 to emulate the guiro. The drum set part can also be played with straight quarters on the bell.
BOLEZRO

A Cuban Bolero is a slow "torch song." The defining characteristics for the drummer are the maraca rhythm (played on the cascara in the timbale part) and the conga open tones at the end of the measure. The bass player usually highlights \( \frac{1}{3} 4 \frac{1}{3} 4 \).

The drum set part is played with the snares off. The measure starts with a LH cross stick. The triplet is performed by the RH alone.

MAMBO

Mambo is an uptempo style from the son tradition. Below are two possibilities. Note that the second timbale version is for two bells.
Rumba Clave

Rumba clave has a more folkloric feel. The sonbo note receives the most emphasis.

3-2 Rumba Clave

Rumba Guaguancó

The guaguancó has a distinctive open tone melody. Note that the timbales play cascara with rumba clave now.

The HH can also play down beats, upbeats, or both. The ride cymbal part can be played on the side of the floor tom or on a rim for a less prominent sound. The LH should be a rim click at lower volumes. You can leave out the BD downbeats for a more authentic sound.
Mozambique

This style utilizes the rumba clave and outlines the bass tumbao (which has no notes on “one.”)
You can also play the shell with the RH for a cascara effect.

Afro-Cuban 6/8

The conga part is from the Rumba Columbia - notice the open tone melody. The bell pattern is popular
all over Africa - notice the rumba clave in 6/8 that accompanies the bell.

The HH part can also be quarter notes. Try doubling the bell pattern in the BD!
Bass Drum Ostinatos

Try these ostinatos for BD - most are taken from the grooves that precede this. Add HH playing downbeats, upbeats, both, or clave.

Timing Patterns

Use these timing patterns over the ostinatos or as the independent voice in the previous grooves. After you master these, try reading from the Chester book or similar materials.
Bossa Nova

Bossa Nova began in the 1950’s with composers like Jobim and Gilberto slowing down the rhythms of samba and mixing it with the harmonic language of jazz. I like to start the study of Brazilian rhythms with Bossa Nova because of the relaxed tempo. Soon, we will learn where many of these rhythms came from.

Basic Bossa Nova Pattern

Ride Cymbal variation

Hi-hat variation

Note that the open/close sound of the hi-hat creates two distinct pitches. This is very important in Brazilian music.
Samba Variations

Samba precedes bossa nova historically and you should be able to see how the rhythms of BN came from the street music of Samba.
This bd ostinato has become very popular in the USA. Try using different variations in the left hand.
Clave Review

Almost all Latin music is governed by the concept of clave. Below are eight examples of clave and the most common bell rhythms that accompanies them. You should be able to play clave in one hand and cascara (or the 6/8 bell pattern) in the other. Many grooves are built this way.