

Do you feel it's important for all drummers to study Latin music and other musical genres, even if they don't intend to ever perform those styles?

I believe it is very important for drummers, regardless of their primary stylistic playing interest, age, experience, or ability to learn many styles of music and drumming. I had the great fortune that my first drum teacher loved Afro-Cuban music and played timbales, congas, and bongos. After about 6 months of drum study, he put on an LP (yes, vinyl!) and we listened to a couple tracks. Although I thought the music was interesting, I didn't have a point of reference; I wanted to play rock and jazz and remember thinking that I didn't really understand this different music nor why we were listening to it. He showed me a couple basic timbale patterns and I began studying the latin instruments and the music, and after a few weeks I was hooked!

In many countries, especially those in Africa, South America, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and throughout the Caribbean, drumming is an important part of the culture and the day-to-day lives of the people. Drumming, music, and dance are an integral part of their religious and social rituals, history, and entertainment. In these societies, drums are considered almost sacred, and the rhythms, techniques, and the music is a 'music of the people' performed by professional musicians and millions of everyday people, alike. It could be said that, in these cultures, almost everyone is a drummer.

The benefits of studying Latin and other musical genres are tremendous and could easily fill a book with explanations and examples. I'll just list a few of the benefits that I, and my students, have realized - some are drumming, some are musical, and some are just about growing as a person.

Studying and learning to play Latin and other musical genres:

- develops respect and understanding of other people, cultures, and music, especially those that are very different from our own;
- helps to develop a drummer's own niche and way of playing – a unique drumming and musical voice;
- informs and influences your other styles of playing (technically and musically);
- contributes to becoming an educated musical drummer and person while expanding musical vocabulary and 'ways of knowing' and doing things;
- increases our awareness of how rhythms and sounds are organized, and of the different roles of drums and drumming in music throughout the world;
- broadens drumming technique and musicality through learning alternate uses of the sounds and limbs;
- provides a framework for students of the instrument to continue on a lifelong thirst for knowledge and improvement, and a quest for greater understanding.

A few examples of drummers who have been heavily influenced by the study of Latin and world music include

- Sonny Emory (left foot clave while soloing),
- Dave Weckl (incorporating Songo and Cuban influences into funk and jazz playing),
- Steve Smith (studying and using the music, instruments, and rhythms of India),
- Steve Gadd (famous drumset interpretation of a Mozambique rhythm)
- and countless others rock, jazz, metal, pop drummers including Rod Morgenstein, Shelia E, Tommy Igoe, Adam Nussbaum, and of course the late (and GREAT) Chuck Silverman whose lifetime of contributions to the study of Latin musics and rhythms have helped to make them understood and accessible to drummers throughout the world.

At first, listening to professional musicians from other countries play their indigenous music can be intimidating, and create a sense of fear or panic about learning that music. I tell my students who are new to this to pick a style (I call this a 'gateway' style) – one that interests them and that they feel is just outside of their comfort zone, but not so far outside that it's intimidating, and start there. 'Gateway' styles and materials that I recommend include Samba and Cha Cha Cha, and instructional books and videos by Chuck Silverman.

Learning to play any musical style is not about learning 'beats' and patterns, but about studying, understanding, and respecting the people, culture, music, and traditions, including religious and dance. I believe this is a path to becoming a better musician and person while providing a great sense of satisfaction and growth.