Intro to Afro-Cuban Mambo Ryhthms and Drumset Patterns

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Afro-Cuban Clave Basics

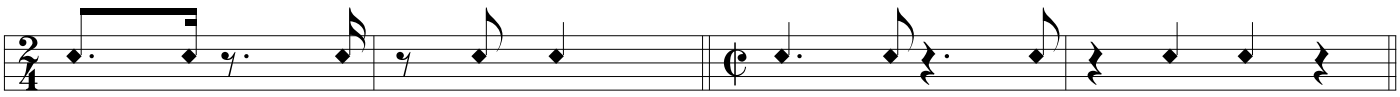
Most Afro-Cuban styles of music are built around a 2-measure rhythm called "clave", a Spanish word meaning "key". Clave forms the foundation for rhythms played by the percussionists, as well as those played and sung by all other instrumentalists and singers, including melodic phrases, background and accompanying parts, and improvisation. Clave is a "fixed" rhythm - it does not turn around, mutate, nor permutate, and the 2 measures are never divided nor separated and repeated. Each ensemble member must always be on the same measure (side) of the clave.

Every song, or section, is in either 2-3 or 3-2 clave. In a song in 3-2 clave the first bar contains the 3 beats of the clave rhythm and the second bar contains the 2 other beats. Of course, 2-3 clave is the opposite of that. The only difference is which side of the clave you are playing in the first measure. Once created in a particulart clave, a song or arrangement always remains in that clave and can not be played in the other, since so many parts of the song and arrangement are built around the clave rhythm.

The 3-side of the clave (the measure which contains 3 notes), is known as the "tresillo" and is the strong side of the clave (tension); the 2-side of the clave is called the "debil" and is the weak side of the clave (release). The specific clave rhythm is often not played by itself, but can be heard as part of, and the basis of, other rhythmic parts.

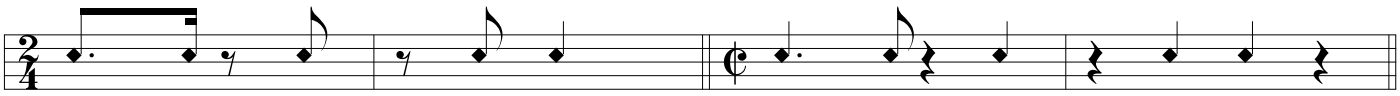
Traditionally, many latin musics are written in 2/4 time. The following rhythms are written in both 2/4 and 2/2 time signatures.

3-2 Rumba Clave



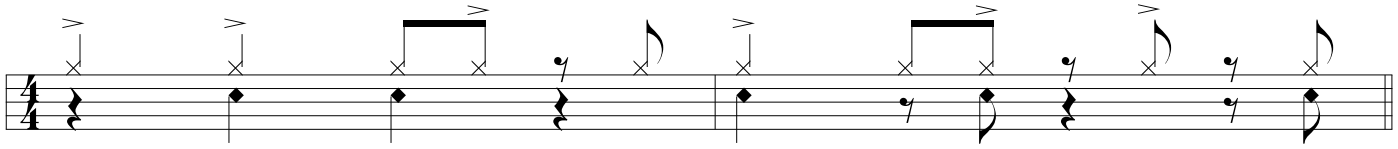
Son and rumba clave are differentiated by the placement of the last note on the 3-side.
The 2nd note on the 3-side of the clave is called the "bombo", the 3rd note on the 3-side is called the"ponche".

3-2 Son Clave



Bell, palito, and cascara patterns used in many traditional and contemporary styles, which are often played by the timbalero and/or the drummer, are derived from both sacred and secular folkloric traditions.The cascara or "shell" pattern is a very commonly heard rhythm in Afro-Cuban styles. It is called cascara because it is often played on the shells of the timbales or on the rim of the floor tom on the drum set during soft sections of an arrangement. It is also sometimes referred to as palito which means "little sticks" because it is sometimes played on the gua gua, a mounted piece of bamboo. Today, cascara refers more to the rhythm itself than to the drum on which it is played.

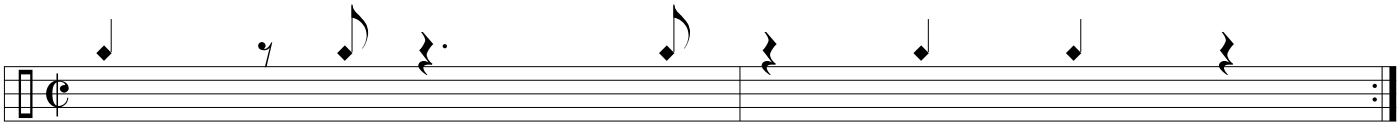
Cascara pattern with 2/3 rumba clave



Clave Patterns

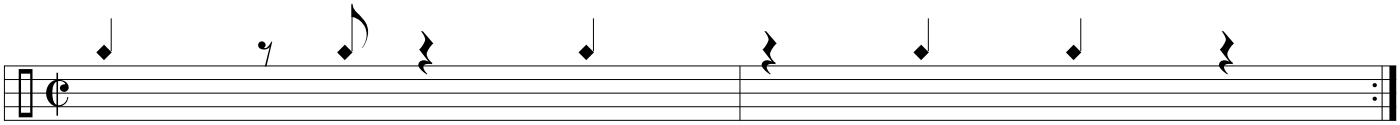
3/2 rumba clave

#1



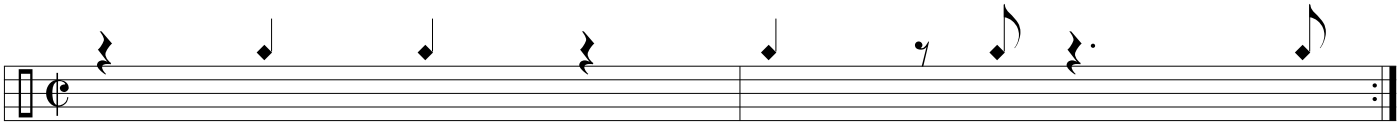
3/2 son clave

#2



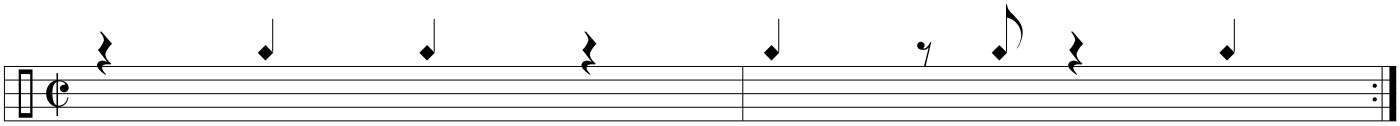
2/3 rumba clave

#3



2/3 son clave

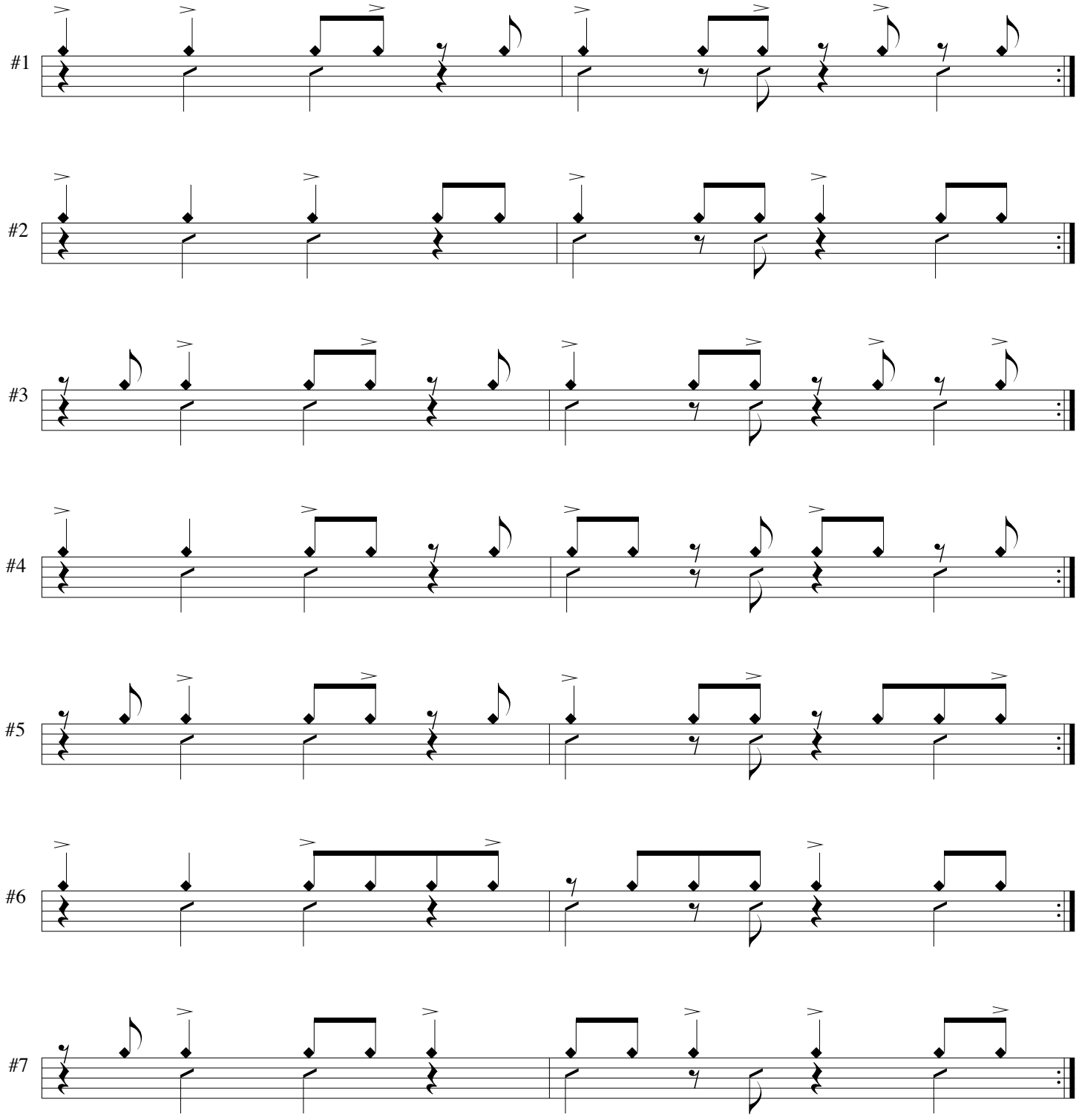
#4



2/3 Bell/Cascara Patterns

Played with Son Clave

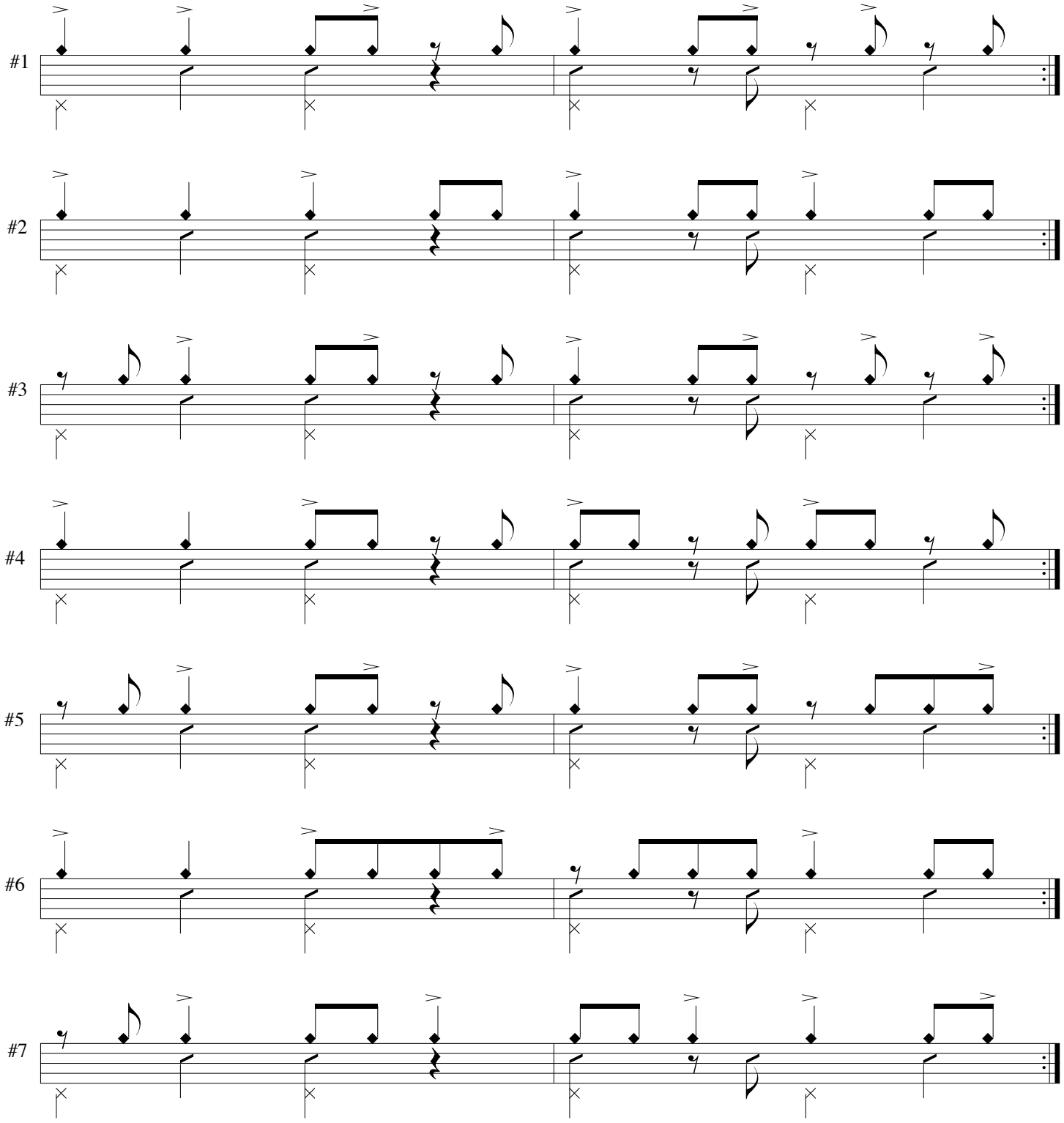
1) Play the bell pattern with the RH on the rim or shell of the floor tom, a mambo bell, or a cymbal bell. Play the clave with the LH across the rim of the snare (snares off), on the high hat, or around the drums.
2) Reverse the hand assignments, and play the bell pattern with the LH, and the clave rhythm with the RH.



2/3 Bell/Cascara Patterns

with son clave and left foot on 1 and 3

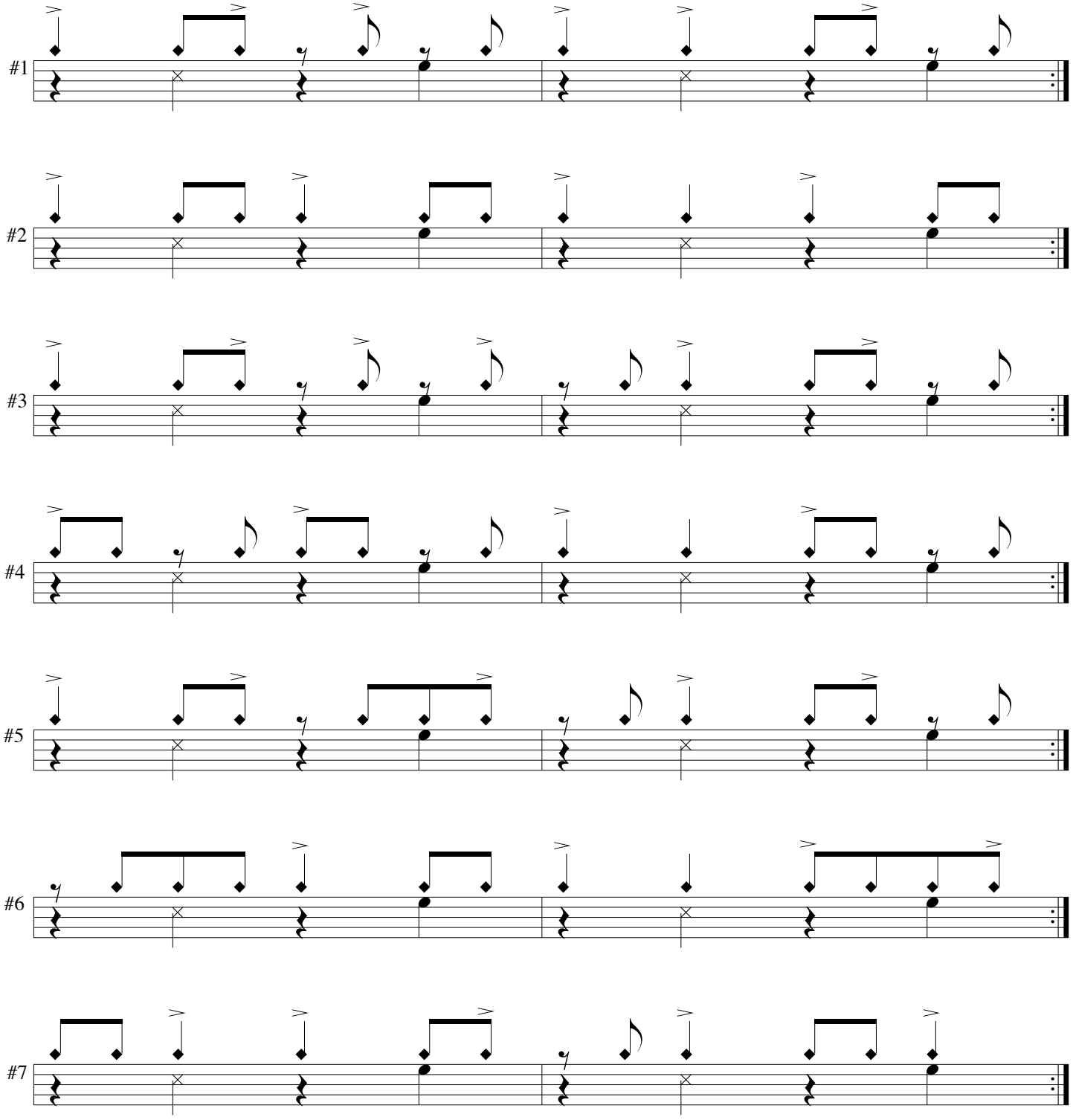
1) Play the bell pattern with the Right Hand on the rim or shell of the floor tom, a mambo bell, or a cymbal bell. Play the clave rhythm with the Left Hand across the rim of the snare (snares off), on the high hat, or around the drums.
   Play Left Foot on high hat, or with a foot pedal on a wood block/cowbell.
2) Reverse the hand assignments and play the bell pattern with the Left Hand, and the clave rhythm with the Right Hand.



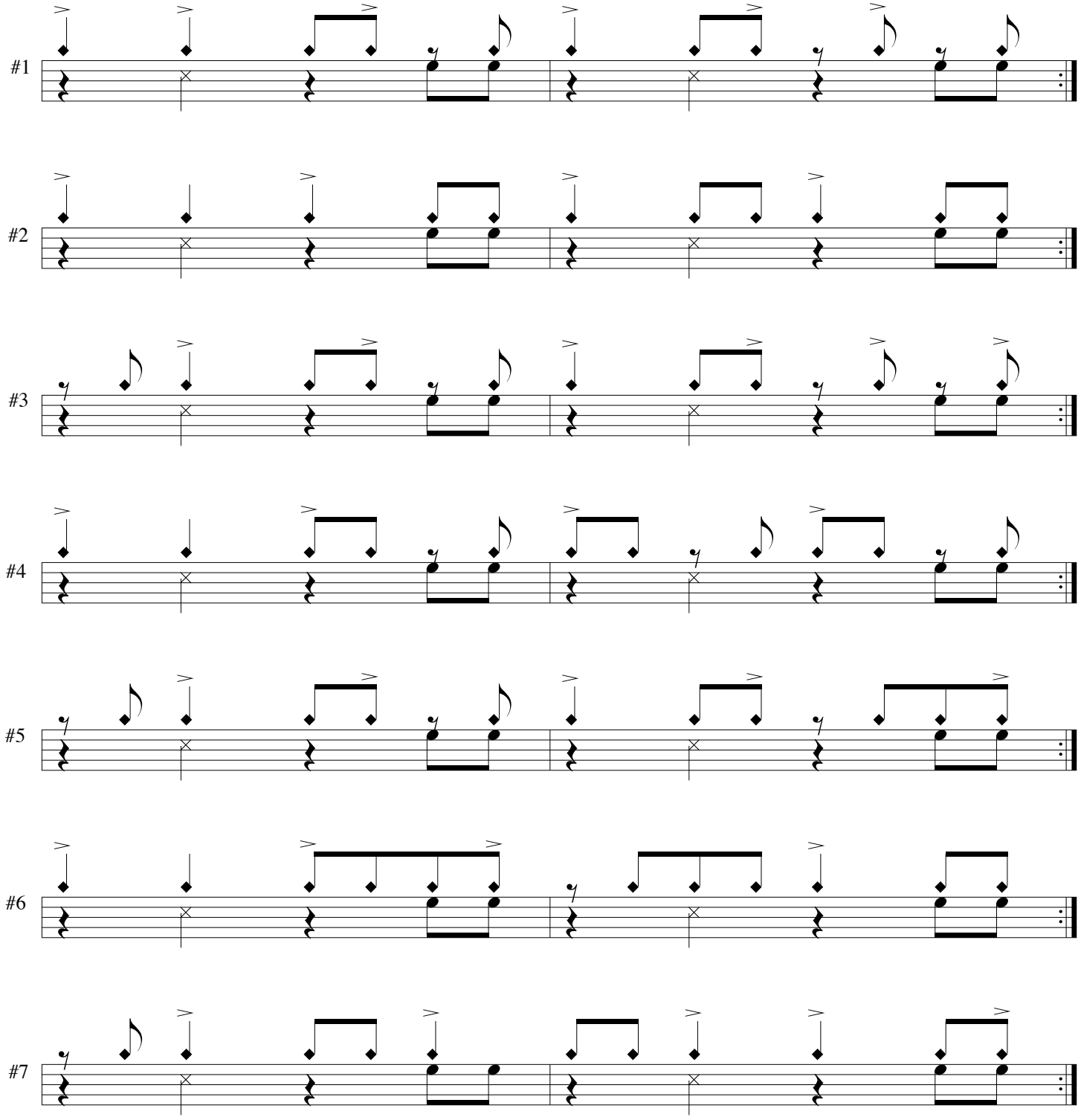
3/2 Bell/Cascara Patterns

With Left Hand Variation #1

1) Play the bell pattern with the Right Hand and the other rhythm with Left Hand.
2) Reverse the hand assignments and play the bell pattern with the Left Hand and the other rhythm with the Right Hand.



2/3 Bell/Cascara Patterns

With Left Hand Variation #2

1) Play the bell pattern with the Right Hand and the other rhythm with Left Hand.
2) Reverse the hand assignments and play the bell pattern with the Left Hand and the other rhythm with the Right Hand.