

Timbales

Bare Bones Productions

*These drums are very loud and are used for accents and solos.
The Timbalero plays the shells, wood block, bells and/or cymbal most of the time.*

The Drums In Latin music, the Timbalero is the one who plays these drums but really, they get to play much more than just the two drums. Timbales usually have two cowbells, called “Campanas”, mounted between them. The larger of the two is the Mambo Bell and the smaller the Cha Cha. Above the bells is often a wood block on which is played the “Clave” rhythm around which a lot of Latin music is based. Above the block is sometimes a cymbal. The Timbalero spends a lot of time playing a rhythm called “Cascara”, which means shell in Spanish.

The shells of the Timbales are also referred to as “Cascara” or “Paila”. Paila is a Spanish word for bucket and also means “a bowl that holds sugar cane juice” used on the sugar plantations. The first lightweight, Cuban Tympanis were made from these bowls and are the ancestors of modern Timbales. Tympanis are the large “Kettle Drums” you hear played



History The timbales were designed as a more portable replacement for the European Tympani. Tympanis were first seen in Cuba when an Italian Opera company toured the country in the late 1800’s. The name “Timbale” is actually French in origin from the French “Contradanse”. This music used a smaller version of the Tympani called “Timbal Criollo” or “Creole Tympani”. Cuban Danzón music is derived from this French Contradanse. Danzón is an elegant music played by a brass band. As with most Cuban music, the rhythm played in Danzón is based on the “Clave” but is

played mostly on the drums. The predecessor of today’s popular “Salsa” music is called “Son”. In the late 1930’s, the Cuban dictator, Gerardo Machado, banned the playing of Bongos in Son music, so small Timbales called “Timbalitos” were used instead. A cowbell was added to the Timbalero’s set-up to take over the Bongocero’s bell parts. As the Timbale’s role evolved, more “voices” were added including another bell, a wood-block and a cymbal.

Timbales Today The most famous Timbalero of all time is bandleader, composer, arranger, percussionist, and mentor, Tito Puente, who passed away in 2000. Tito Puente was born in New York and is generally credited with the current popularity of the Timbales. While the Timbales have been a staple in Cuban and Puerto Rican bands for almost a century, they have a far greater scope today than ever. You will hear Timbales being played in lots of different kinds of music now including Rock, Funk, Reggae, African, Jazz, Pop and even Hip Hop, Techno and House music. Bones plays the Mambo Bell and the Bongo Bell and Cascara on the song “Ritmo del Sol” which means “Rhythm of the Sun” in Spanish. He also plays a Timbale solo at the end of this song in which you can hear the two drums, the bells, wood-block and cymbal.