**Transatlantic Beats: Common ground in Congolese and Cuban dance music.**

There is a longstanding historical and cultural relationship between Congo and Cuba via the slave trade and the ‘return’ of Cuban music to Africa, a relationship that has apparently been very scantily documented. It is acknowledged that Congolese roots are present in Cuban music but there is little musical analysis of the actual elements concerned. My contribution to existing research is to investigate what links, if any, exist between contemporary Congolese and Cuban music.

I explore the relationship between Congolese and Cuban music through working with musicians from the two traditions, bringing them together in a band. Using performance as research methodology and working through the composition, rehearsal and performance process together we have been able to look in depth at details of our musical traditions. At previous BFE study days I have discussed some of the similarities that we have recognized in our music. One significant shared feature is a two part song structure, with an extended ‘dancing part’ ending the song. In his insightful writings on Congolese Popular Music, Rumba Rules (2008), Bob White cites this ‘unique’ two part song structure as central to the pan-African popularity of the music. I draw parallels between this and the structure of Cuban Son, demonstrating that the tight formula with open and improvised sections within the form, allows for exciting and engaging performance. In this presentation I will focus in detail on common ground within this dancing section, reflecting on the similarities and differences in creation of groove and presentation between the two styles. I intend to use live and recorded musical examples, scores and videos to illustrate my observations.

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