

Gonzalo Rubalcaba's Blend of Cuban Music and Jazz: Two Current Examples of Hybridization

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Introduction

Hybridizations of Cuban music and jazz are nothing new. Since its beginnings jazz has often been combined with traditional Cuban musical styles, especially Cuban rhythms (e.g., the *habanera* ♩. ♩♪♪, *cinquillo* ♩♪♪♪♪ and *tresillo* ♩. ♩.); these were incorporated in pieces as early as Jelly Roll Morton's *New Orleans Blues* (composed around 1902), in which – as Morton himself explained in an interview with Alan Lomax – “you can notice the Spanish tinge”¹ (Lomax, 1973: 62) or W. C. Handy's *St. Louis Blues* (recorded in 1919), where the *habanera* rhythm is used (Hendler, 2008: 106–107).² Due to the geographical proximity of the southern U.S.A. and Cuba, interaction between musicians of the two countries was common.

This paper will explore two current examples of combined Cuban and jazz elements in performances by the Cuban jazz pianist and composer Gonzalo Rubalcaba (b. 1963). Rubalcaba, generally considered one of the leading contemporary jazz pianists, has developed his own style, characterized largely by exactly this kind of musical crossover. Born into

a distinguished musical family, he grew up with a strong musical tradition, as he confirmed in an interview with Holston (1991: 69): “All of my musical influence comes from the tradition of my family”.

The genres and pieces to be discussed are the *danzón* style as exemplified in the piece *El Cadete Constitucional* as well as the *bolero* style, using the piece *Silencio*. Following an overview of the basic characteristics of the two genres, the main results of musical analyses regarding structure, rhythm, melody and harmony will be presented by means of selected examples. Based on self-made transcriptions, the musical analyses enable direct comparisons between the original versions and the jazz interpretations, illustrating Rubalcaba’s treatment of traditional elements.

Regarding Cuban elements, a special focus will be placed on the repetitive rhythmic figure known as *clave*, which usually provides the rhythmic foundation and serves as a point of reference for the instrumentalists. As to jazz elements, the harmonization of the pieces is most relevant to the discussion. It consists of functional, Western-based harmony, as such the common Western denominations and analysis methods are used.

In sum, the paper will describe the major features of Rubalcaba’s interpretations of traditional genres.

The *danzón*: Background Information and Main Musical Characteristics

The *danzón* originated from the popular European country dances of the 17th and 18th centuries: The “country dance” had emerged in the English folk tradition and was rapidly absorbed by the English court society. It spread to the Continent, where it became known as *contradanse* in France, *Kontratanz* in Germany and *contradanza* in Spain (Burford & Daye, 2007–2010). European immigrants brought this music to the “New World”: The popular *contradanza* appeared in Cuba in the 18th century, probably carried by shipping traffic between Spain and its colony (Giro, 2007a). Out of the *contradanza*, the *danza* and later the *danzón*, which means “big dance”, were developed during the 19th century in Cuba. The first officially presented *danzón* was *Las Alturas De Simpsón*, composed by Miguel Faílde Pérez (1852–1921) and premiered on January 1, 1879

in Matanzas. The *danzón* soon became the most popular and representative national dance of Cuba (Giro, 2007b; Roy, 2002).

The *danzones* were played by so-called *orquestas típicas*, orchestras consisting of woodwinds, brass, violins, bass and percussion. At the end of the 19th century, the *orquesta típica* was replaced by the *charanga*, a smaller ensemble, where wooden flutes were used instead of clarinets, and the brass instruments disappeared in favour of the Cuban *tres*³ or harp. From 1910 on, the piano was added to the *charanga* format, which then was renamed *charanga francesa*;⁴ this format – consisting of flute(s), violin(s), bass, piano, *güiro* and *timbales* (or *pailas*) – is still the leading, “classic” format (Hendler, 2007; Sublette, 2004).

A main musical characteristic of the Cuban *danzón* is the use of the *cinquillo cubano*, the oldest known *clave* in Cuban and Caribbean music⁵: ♩♪♪♪♪♪♪♪. Another major characteristic is the formal sequence, a rondo form with the basic structure A–B–A–C–A where section A, called *introducción* (“introduction”), is repeated and serves as a transition between the danced parts. The sections usually consist of eight or sixteen bars and are dominated by a particular instrument group that plays the main melody, like B, the *parte de flauta* (“flute part”), or C, the *parte de violín* (“violin part”). The last important change to the established form was the addition of a *montuno* section at the end of the *danzón*. The *montuno*, taken from the *son* genre already popular at the time, was the section where the instrumentalists got the chance to improvise; this became known as “*danzón con montuno*”.⁶ Another common feature established in *danzón* compositions from the early 20th century onwards was the incorporation of melodies from popular pieces, such as classical and operatic themes, chansons and *boleros* (Giro, 2004; Sublette, 2004).

El Cadete Constitucional

El Cadete Constitucional (English: “The Constitutional Cadet”) was composed in the 1920s by Gonzalo Rubalcaba’s grandfather Jacobo González Rubalcaba (1895–1960), a famous composer of *danzones*, conductor and musician. The recording of this piece from the Archives of the Center for the Investigation and Development of Cuban Music (CIDMUC) was used for analysis.⁷ Since this recording is as historically correct an interpretation as possible (using original scores, instruments

etc.), the term “original” is used in the following analyses. The piece is played by the “Charanga Típica Cubana”, and is a *danzón con montuno* with the *cinquillo cubano* as a rhythmical foundation. The key is F major, and as a special feature in the violin part (section C), the melody of John Philip Sousa’s famous military march *The Stars And Stripes Forever* (1897) is used as a main melody.

Gonzalo Rubalcaba’s interpretation was recorded in 2000 on *Supernova*⁸ with Rubalcaba on piano and keyboards, Carlos Henríquez on bass, Ignacio Berroa on drums, Luís Quintero on *timbales* and *güiro* and Roberto Quintero on *conga*. Like in this version of *El Cadete Constitucional*, in his *danzones* Rubalcaba generally remains quite close to the traditional characteristics: He uses the basic clave (*cinquillo cubano*), traditional percussion instruments, the basic melodic and harmonic scheme and the established formal structure.

Original

| | A | B | A | C | A | D | E |
|------|--------------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| part | introduction | flute part | introduction | violin part | introduction | ending (flute) | Montuno (improvisations) |
| bars | 16 | 16 | 16 | 32 | 16 | 24 | 116 |

Rubalcaba's interpretation

| | A | B | A | | C | A | D | E |
|------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------|--------------------------|
| part | introduction | “flute part” | introduction | transition | “violin part” (bass, piano) | introduction | ending | Montuno (improvisations) |
| bars | 16 | 16 | 8 | 4 | 32 | 8 | 24 | 122 (fade out) |

Table 1. Comparison of Form: Original and Rubalcaba’s Interpretation

As shown in Table 1, Rubalcaba basically keeps the original structure but makes minor changes: He plays the second and third A sections, originally consisting of 16 bars – an eight bar phrase, repeated – without the repetition; furthermore, a short transition of four bars is added before going to section C. In the eight-bar passages of all A sections, the first four bars show extensive similarities; one can reasonably assume that these bars are composed. However, bars 5 to 8 of each A section are always different and seem to be improvised over a specific harmonic scheme.

The image shows two musical staves for the first A section (bars 1-4). The top staff is labeled 'Original' and features Violins/Piano. The bottom staff is labeled 'Rubalcaba' and features Piano and Bass. Both staves are in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The original score has a melody in the upper voice and accompaniment in the lower voice. Rubalcaba's version has a similar melody but with more complex accompaniment in the piano part, including triplets and ornaments. Chord symbols are provided above the staves: F, C7, G7, C, Gm7, C.

Example 1. Comparison of Original and Rubalcaba's Interpretation (first A section, bars 1–4)

The comparison of the composed bars in Example 1 demonstrates Rubalcaba's melodic line to be almost identical to the original; only the short transition in bar 2 is varied. Rubalcaba also adds small ornamentalations, like in the up-beat and bars 2 and 3 in the left hand, played throughout the piece. A general characteristic of both versions is the use of the *cinquillo* ♪♪♪♪ as melody rhythm, such as in the up-beat. Regarding harmony, Rubalcaba just inserts an additional II–V progression in bar 2 (Gm–C).

Rubalcaba's improvised bars (bars 5–8) contain more changes from the original version:

The image shows two musical staves for the first A section (bars 5-8). The top staff is labeled 'Original' and features Flute. The bottom staff is labeled 'Rubalcaba' and features Piano and Bass. Both staves are in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The original score has a melody in the upper voice and accompaniment in the lower voice. Rubalcaba's version has a similar melody but with more complex accompaniment in the piano part, including triplets and ornaments. Chord symbols are provided above the staves: C7, F, D7, G7, C, F, Gm, C7, Fmaj7, F, Dm, G7, C7, F. Below the staves, a harmonic diagram shows the progression: F: II V7 I VI II7 V7 I. A green arrow points from II to V7, and a blue arrow points from II7 to V7.

Example 2. Comparison of Original and Rubalcaba's Interpretation (first A section, bars 5–8)

As shown in Example 2, Rubalcaba brings his melody forward by suddenly reducing the volume from bar 5 onwards (*mp*). He uses the original harmonic scheme but inserts additional II–V progressions, creating standard II–V–I jazz cadences; he also adds chord extensions common to jazz. In all examples, the square arrows indicate II–V, and the bent arrows V–I progressions.

After the composed passage in bars 9 to 12, a repetition of bars 1 to 4 with a varied ending (compare Example 1), Rubalcaba creates the following reharmonization in the next improvised bars (13–16):

Chord symbols for Example 3:

System 1 (Bars 13-15): C⁷, G⁷, C Gm C, Gm, C, C⁷

System 2 (Bars 16-16): E⁷, A⁷b⁵, Dm, B⁷, E⁷, C⁷

Below the score, the harmonic progression is summarized as follows:

Dm: II⁷ V⁷ I VI⁷ II⁷ F: V⁷ I

Example 3. Rubalcaba's Reharmonization (first A section, bars 9–16)

From the dominant seventh chord (C⁷) in bar 12, Rubalcaba goes to E⁷, the mediant of C (major third upwards). Since it is not a diatonic chord in F major, E⁷ is a rather surprising sound. Bars 13 to 15 contain V–I progressions: E⁷ leads as a fifth degree to A, and A⁷ is again the fifth degree of the following D minor chord. Then, B⁷, sixth degree of D minor, again is the fifth degree of E. Rubalcaba closes the circle with a third relationship going back to C⁷, the dominant seventh chord of the tonic F major. Looking at these harmonies with D minor as temporary tonic, Rubalcaba's reharmonization technique becomes clear: He uses the same degrees as in bars 5 to 8 in the tonic F major (compare Example 2), but

due to the changed tonic (D minor) and selected changed modes (major ↔ minor) a completely new sound is created.

In the corresponding bars in the following A sections (see Examples 4 and 5) the same reharmonization is applied, again played mezzopiano and with the same ending. In the second A, some additional chord extensions and a voicing in fourths are used:

Example 4. Rubalcaba's Reharmonization (second A section, bars 5–8)

In the third and last A section, the melody is more agitated (more sixteenth notes):

Example 5. Rubalcaba's Reharmonization (third A section, bars 5–8)

In section B (16 bars), Rubalcaba maintains the basic melodic and harmonic scheme; in addition to melodic variations, harmonic amendments to the originally rather simple conception are made: V–I and (VI–)II–V progressions. The major change in Rubalcaba's interpretation is the character, very fine and delicate – contrary to the original version, where it is played at a rather high volume by the whole orchestra with the flute as the leading melody instrument.

Example 6. Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section B, bars 1–8)

The score consists of two systems. The first system covers bars 1-4, and the second system covers bars 5-8. The piano part is in the treble clef, and the bass part is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo/mood is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The piano part features a melodic line with triplets and staccato articulation. The bass part provides harmonic support with sparse voicings. Chord symbols (F, C7, Gm, V7, VI) and performance markings (pp, accents) are included.

Example 6. Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section B, bars 1–8)

As shown in Example 6, the melody in bars 1 to 8 is played monophonically by the right hand on piano. Rubalcaba's dramatic pianissimo and staccato performance emphasizes the familiar melody; in combination with sparse voicings in the left-hand and the bass, generally confined to playing the roots only, these elements result in a transparent sound: clear but very minimal and delicate. The outstanding moment comes in bar 4, when Rubalcaba plays a Bb5 – instead of the expected A5 – as the final note of the phrase. This, in combination with the root F, creates an unexpected friction.

In the following bars 9 to 16 Rubalcaba basically replicates the harmonic scheme with slight changes. Moreover, a new arrangement technique is used: the harmonization of the melody in a three-voice texture together with the left hand.

Example 7. Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section B, bars 9–12)

The score consists of two systems. The first system covers bars 9-10, and the second system covers bars 11-12. The piano part is in the treble clef, and the bass part is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The piano part features a three-voice texture with triplets and staccato articulation. The bass part provides harmonic support with sparse voicings. Chord symbols (F, C7, Dm) and performance markings (accents) are included.

Example 7. Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section B, bars 9–12)

In his C section, Rubalcaba also uses John Philip Sousa’s *The Stars And Stripes Forever* as main melody. Originally played by the violins in thirds, in Rubalcaba’s version the bass plays the melody with the bow, in legato and absolutely “straight”, without the least variation:

Example 8 shows the musical score for the bass part of *The Stars And Stripes Forever* in section C, bars 1–4. The score is written for Piano and Bass. The Piano part is in the treble clef and has a chord symbol F^{maj7} above the first measure. The Bass part is in the bass clef and is marked *legato*. The melody in the bass is played in a straight, legato style.

Example 8. Melody of *The Stars And Stripes Forever* in Bass (section C, bars 1–4)

The special allure of the C section is achieved by the following contrast: After the rather simple passage with the bass as melody instrument and the accompaniment (piano and percussion) still in a Cuban style, from the up-beat to bar 21 onwards the piano continues the melody in the right hand, identifiable but varied, including jazz harmonies and dense voicings (see Example 9). Moreover, the bass switches to a walking bass line and the drummer uses cymbals and brushes, creating a “jazzier” sound.

Example 9 shows the musical score for the piano part of *The Stars And Stripes Forever* in section C, bars 25–27. The score is written for Piano and Bass. The Piano part is in the treble clef and has chord symbols $D^b maj^{7/9}$, $G^7(b^9)^{13}$, C^9 , and Dm^9 above the measures. The Bass part is in the bass clef and is marked *legato*. The Piano part features a melody in the right hand and dense voicings in the left hand.

Example 9. Melody of *The Stars And Stripes Forever* in Piano (section C, bars 25–27)

The *bolero*: Background Information and Main Musical Characteristics

In Cuba, the *bolero* is the second most common style (after the *son*) and has been continuously composed and played since its beginnings in the late 19th century. Like the *criolla*, *trova*, *canción* or the later *habanera*, the *bolero* is an integral part of Cuban song repertoire – in fact, it was the first Cuban vocal style to become internationally popular, with famous pieces such as *Perfidia* (by Alberto Domínguez) or *Quizás, Quizás, Quizás* (by Osvaldo Farrés). *Tristezas* is regarded as the first Cuban *bolero* and was composed in 1885 by José “Pepe” Sánchez (1856–1918), a guitarist and composer from Santiago de Cuba. Sánchez is considered by some the founder of the *trova* movement in eastern Cuba in the late 19th century. *Trova* refers to a form of sung poetry where the performers – the *trovadores*⁹ – commented on anything seeming worthy of attention. Sánchez was a pioneer, evolving the specific stylistic elements of the *bolero* out of the *trova* movement. A lively culture of musical exchange between Cuba and Mexico brought the *bolero* to Mexico at the beginning of the 20th century. As a result, Mexico is as important as Cuba in the development of the Latin American *bolero*, mainly due to the work of the Mexican composer and pianist Agustín Lara (1897–1970). In the 1920s and 1930s, the *bolero* became a popular song genre throughout Latin America and from the 1940s onwards worldwide (Roy, 2002; Sublette, 2004).

Although the name “bolero” was taken from the Spanish dance of the same name, which had come to Cuba in 1810 and was popular throughout the 19th century, the Cuban *bolero* has nothing in common with the Spanish one. The most important difference lies in the rhythm: The Spanish variant is always played in a triple meter; the Cuban *bolero* in a duple meter. Furthermore, the most characteristic feature of the Cuban *bolero* is not a specific *clave* figure, but the character of the songs: sentimental, reflective and sorrowful, with a romantic, melancholic content (Hendler, 2007). The topic is love, the desire for love or the sorrow of lost love, illustrated by the saying “El bolero es un mensajero público y popular del amor” (“The bolero is a public and popular messenger of love”) (Congreso MIC III, 2009). The melody is always paramount and sung very clearly, with the accompaniment in the background. The tempo is usually moderate and the song form binary (A–B). Although there is no

specific *clave* for *boleros*, rhythmic figures can appear in the melodic lines and/or in the accompaniment.

Silencio

Silencio (English: “Silence”) was composed in 1932 by the Puerto Rican pianist, composer and bandleader Rafael Hernández (1893–1965). The lyrics were also written by Hernández and have a typical sentimental character and melancholic content¹⁰:

Duermen en mi jardín las blancas azucenas,
los nardos y las rosas.
Mi alma, muy triste y pesarosa,
a las flores quiere ocultar su amargo dolor.
Yo no quiero que las flores sepan
los tormentos que me da la vida.
Si supieran lo que estoy sufriendo,
por mis penas morirían también.
Silencio, que están durmiendo
los nardos y las azucenas.
No quiero que sepan mis penas,
porque si me ven llorando morirán.

They sleep in my garden, the white lilies,
the nards and the roses.
My soul, very sad and sorrowful,
from the flowers I want to hide the bitter pain.
I don't want the flowers to know
the torments of my life.
If they knew how I am suffering
they would die of pain, too.
Silence, because they are sleeping,
the nards and the lilies.
I don't want them to know my pains,
because if they see me crying they will die.

The oldest currently available recording (in the following also called “oldest version”) was made by Antonio Machín and his quartet in March 1934 and was used for the musical analyses and comparisons in this paper.¹¹ It was recorded as a *bolero-son*; here *son* refers to the *clave del son* J. J. J. J. J. J. J. J., the *clave* forming the basis of the *son* style and used as rhyth-

mic accompaniment throughout the piece. Furthermore, an improvised *montuno* section, also characteristic of the *son*, is added at the end of the piece.¹² Due to its rhythmic and formal flexibility the *bolero* has commonly been combined with elements from other genres, frequently with the *son* since the late 1920s.¹³ On this recording of *Silencio*, Machín sings the lead and plays *claves*, Daniel Sánchez sings the second voice and plays the guitar, Cándido Vicenty plays *tres* and Plácido Acevedo trumpet. The key is A minor, and as typical for a *bolero*, the melody is mainly sung in thirds and sixths and the singers are very much in the foreground; slides and vibrato are used for dramatic effect.

Rubalcaba's version was recorded in 2005 as a solo interpretation on piano on the CD *Solo*.¹⁴ It is played in G minor, a whole tone lower than Machín's recording. Like this interpretation of *Silencio*, Rubalcaba's *bolero* interpretations are generally further away from the originals. While keeping the basic structure, the main melodic lines and the basic harmonic schemes, he often changes the basic character, thus creating rather different versions of the song.

| Oldest version (Machín) | | | Rubalcaba's interpretation | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| structure | bars | special feature | structure | bars | special feature |
| introduction | 5 bars | <i>tres</i> , guitar | | | no introduction |
| section A | 16 bars | 2 vocalists, accompaniment, <i>clave del son (cds)</i> | section A | 16 bars | no <i>clave</i> |
| | 16 bars | | | 16 bars | |
| section B | 16 bars | 2 vocalists, accompaniment, <i>cds</i> | section B | 16 bars | one octave lower, no <i>clave</i> |
| | 16 bars (repetition) | trumpet, accompaniment, <i>cds</i> | | 16 bars (repetition) | no <i>clave</i> |

Table 2. Comparison of Form: Oldest Version and Rubalcaba's Interpretation

As shown in Table 2, Rubalcaba plays the *bolero* in its original length but omits the introduction. Since Rubalcaba plays the whole piece solo without any accompanying instrument, no *clave* appears. One main difference in comparison to Machín's recording is the character, which is very calm and restrained, musically reinforced by a low volume and a rubato feeling; the complete lack of a steady beat is atypical for a *bolero*, though the melodic rhythm is still identifiable. Because of this restrained character and ballad-like style, the general tempo is rather slow. The duration of the piece is 3 minutes and 40 seconds, two minutes longer than sections A and B of Machín's recording.

Machín

Duer - men en mi jar - din, las blan - cas a - zu - ce-

Rubalcaba

mp

Chords: Gm, D7, Gm, Gmadd9, Cm/G, F#dim7/G, Eb/G

Articulation: Pedal points with accents and slurs

Example 10. Comparison of Oldest Version and Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section A, bars 1–4)¹⁵

At the beginning (Example 10), and throughout the performance Rubalcaba plays the melody in the top voice of the right hand. A direct comparison shows that it is very close to the original melody and easily recognizable. It is played a little louder and slightly anticipated to add emphasis. In the transcription the anticipations are marked by arrows pointing to the left; the bold arrows indicating to the right show an overall retardation. Furthermore, the melody is played legato throughout, with a good deal of pedal and additional trill-like variations (such as in bar 4). Altogether, the melody is played very quietly, the sound delicate and transparent. Rubalcaba's classical training can be recognized not only in the aforementioned agogics of the upper voice (anticipations), but also in the arrangement: After the first chord with an added ninth (Gm add9, bar 1), the open-position sixth chord in bar 2 (subdominant Cm) and the voice-leading to the diminished chord (F#dim⁷) in particular are reminiscent of Western classical music. At this point, a trained listener would expect the diminished chord leading downwards to the tonic Gm in bar 3 (as arranged by Machín), but Rubalcaba plays an unexpected Eb chord, using an "incorrect" voice-leading and thus creating great harmonic tension.

Rubalcaba often uses unexpected chords or harmonies to create additional tension. Another example can be found in bar 21, an Ab major chord over the "false" bass note A as shown in Example 11.

Example 11. Rubalcaba's Harmonization (section A, bars 20–21)

Besides variations and ornamentations, various suspensions are made in the main melody of *Silencio*, such as in Example 12: Instead of going directly to D, as in the original melody, Rubalcaba plays an accented Eb before resolving it.

Example 12. Comparison of Oldest Version and Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section A, bars 9–10)

A further characteristic is the pedal point G in section A, appearing immediately and continuing until bar 11. From bar 13 onwards, with the changing bass line, Rubalcaba digresses more and more from the original melody:

Example 13. Comparison of Oldest Version and Rubalcaba's Interpretation (section A, bars 13–15)

Generally, more dissonances are used in Rubalcaba's interpretation than on Machín's recording. As can be seen in Example 13, many seconds are used in the left-hand voicings, which add more tension to the overall sound.

Rubalcaba principally maintains the original harmonic frame but adds harmonies and reharmonizes in a jazz style: Besides common extensions (9, 11, 13 and alterations), he uses many suspended sounds (e.g., sus4 chords). Sometimes the suspended chords are resolved, sometimes not. Direct contrasts between complex, dense harmonies and simple triadic sounds also occur frequently.

The beginning of the second B section (see Example 14) reminds the listener once again of Western classical music, in this passage the Romantic Era.

Example 14. Rubalcaba's Arrangement (second B section, bars 1–4)

Rubalcaba starts delicately with a G major triad in open position and creates a melancholic mood with the following minor second move-

ments, also called “sighs”, firstly in the middle voice in bar 2 (going from D#4 to D4). The next sigh motive, in the upper voice, is intensified by the combined anticipation of all voices on the weak beat 4, held until beat 1 in the next bar and then resolved upwards on beat 2 (going from B4 to C5). In contrast, the ending of the phrase on an open-voiced chromatic harmonic shift from C# major to D major (bar 4) makes for a rather jazz-like and momentarily surprising turn. This minor-second movement not only sounds different from the previous ones but is also intensified due to the tripled chromatic movement and the “forbidden” parallel fifths.

The last characteristic of this interpretation to be discussed stems once again from Western classical music: the creation of contrapuntal linear constructions. This musical characteristic is often used by Rubalcaba in his ballad-like pieces, for example in his interpretation of *Bésame Mucho*.¹⁶ In this piece, Rubalcaba at various times plays lines in oblique motion, usually in the left hand in combination with longer-valued notes in the right hand:

Example 15. Rubalcaba’s Linear Construction (section A, bars 23–24)

Finally, Rubalcaba ends his interpretation with just such a contrapuntal linear construction, reminiscent of the Baroque Era: Against the held G3, the two lower voices –parallel tenths – move in seconds, then leap downwards; this movement is then answered by a second movement in the opposite direction. Taken together with the G the movement also results in an additional harmonic progression (G–Am⁷–G/B–Cm–F⁹–G):

15 G rit.

Ped. ^ ^ ^ ^ Ped. ^ Ped. ^ Ped. ^

Example 16. Rubalcaba's Linear Construction (second B section, bars 15–16)

Concluding Remarks

The two genres discussed, *danzón* and *bolero*, were originally developed in Cuba and have played central roles in the musical life of their country of origin as well as influencing genres in other Caribbean and Latin American areas; the *bolero* even achieved worldwide popularity. Furthermore, elements of both genres have often been combined with other styles, both Latin American and international, such as jazz and classical music.

With the *danzón* *El Cadete Constitucional* and the *bolero* *Silencio*, Cuban jazz pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba provides an example of how traditional Cuban elements are being combined with jazz and other elements. The musical analyses reveal that Rubalcaba retains traditional elements of the genres – the original formal structures, basic melodies and harmonic schemes and in the *danzón* even the use of the *cinquillo cubano* as a rhythmic foundation – while varying original melodic lines, adding various ornamentations and suspensions, creating harmonized melodies (e.g., three-voice textures) and adding surprising elements and turns. Harmonically speaking, complex harmonies (with jazz-based chord extensions), additional jazz progressions and reharmonizations are the rule. *Sus4* chords appear regularly but so do dissonant chords (often without resolution) and dense voicings, especially in the left hand. Rubalcaba shows a fondness for surprising and unexpected turns in both his melodic lines and harmonizations. He also works with musical contrasts, stylistically as well as using large dynamic differences and alter-

nations between complexity and simplicity. In the *danzón* he keeps the traditional Cuban rhythmic concept, but his performance of *Silencio* is without a set tempo, calm, delicate and restrained – rather atypical for a *bolero*. Furthermore, he uses arranging and compositional techniques adapted from Western classical music styles (e.g., harmonic arrangement, sigh motives, contrapuntal lines).

Overall, it can be stated that Rubalcaba retains the traditional Cuban genres and the musical characteristics of the original pieces; nonetheless, he makes them his own, combining traditional Cuban elements with aesthetic elements from Western classical music and jazz in his unique musical language.

Notes

1. “Spanish” meant “Spanish-speaking”, and referred to Spanish-speaking Caribbean cultures (such as Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic).
2. For further examples of Caribbean rhythms and influences in early jazz see Washburne, 1997.
3. The *tres* is a guitar-like instrument with three double strings (3 courses, 6 strings) which was created in Cuba.
4. This instrumental addition is accredited to Antonio María Romeu Montero (1876–1955) (Hendler, 2007: 69; Sublette, 2004: 307–308).
5. The oldest known evidence of the *cinquillo cubano* is found in the piece *El Sungambelo* (unknown composer) in 1813 (Hendler, 2007: 72).
6. The *danzón con montuno* was first played in 1910 in the piece *El Bombín De Barreto*, composed by José Urfé González (1879–1957) (Sublette, 2004: 344).
7. Track 4 on the CD *Rétrospective Officielle Des Musiques Cubaines*, Vol. 4, 1999 (rec. 1986).
8. Track 2 on the CD *Supernova*, 2001 (rec. 2000).
9. A *trovador* was an author, composer and performer in one person, who accompanied himself on the guitar.
10. The Spanish text was transcribed from *Antonio Machín*, 1996. The English translation was made by the author.
11. Track 6 on the CD *Antonio Machín*, 1996 (rec. 1934).
12. Since the added *montuno* section is not relevant to the analysis of the *bolero* it will not be discussed in this article.
13. The first known *bolero-son* was recorded by the Septeto Nacional in 1928 (Hendler, 2007: 119).
14. Track 3 on the CD *Solo*, 2006 (rec. 2005).
15. For a direct comparison, Machín’s version was transposed to G minor.
16. Compare Haring, 2006.

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