

# BEYOND SALSA PIANO

## THE CUBAN TIMBA PIANO REVOLUTION



### VOLUME 4 • INTERMEDIATE

CUBAN PIANO TUMBAOS: 1979-1989

by Kevin Moore

photography by Tom Ehrlich  
cover photo subject: Iván "Melón" Lewis

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The first variation, **Tumbao 38**, simply adds some of the accented offbeats back in.

### Tumbao 38 – tracks 75 & 76

In the style of: Orquesta Aliamén: *Échale agua (1b)*– 1988 – tempo=109 bpm – 2-3 clave – piano: Ernesto Ramos

The next variation, **Tumbao 39**, is the exact opposite of Tumbao 37 rhythmically. Tumbao 37 avoids every main beat except one (the backbeat of the 2-side), which is used to mark the clave, while Tumbao 39 hammers out every main beat except one (the anticipation of the 3-side). In this case it's the omitted main beat that marks the clave. Every backbeat is preceded by a pickup and accented, adding a funk feel to the groove.

### Tumbao 39 – tracks 77 & 78

In the style of: Orquesta Aliamén: *Échale agua (1c)*– 1988 – tempo=109 bpm – 2-3 clave – piano: Ernesto Ramos

We're beginning to see that even the best pianists were running out of ways to repackage the same basic ideas. Ramos is bursting with technique, fire and raw energy, like a beast straining to escape the cage of the traditional harmonic structure and gear system. Here in 1988, pianists didn't have long to wait for their freedom – soon the rules of the road would change dramatically and their

## Chapter 3: Elio Revé y su Charangón



**Elio Revé y su Charangón: *Explosión del momento* – Real World Records 2-91301**

*Not to be confused with the 1987 Cuban vinyl LP of the same name, this CD is one of the better compilations of Revé's 1980s work with Juan Carlos Alfonso on piano. There are many compilations, but no reissues of the complete original LPs which are described in loving detail in our [www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com) discography. And tragically, there's never been a CD reissue of **any** of the songs from the groundbreaking pre-Alfonso 1982 album, "Elio Revé y su ritmo changüí", although a few MTV-style videos of some of its tracks can be found at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).*

We first encountered Orquesta Revé in the charanga section of Volume 2 and then again in a very different guise in the changüí-68 section of Volume 3. Like Los Van Van, the group is still extremely popular and innovative in 2010. The period of the 1980s, however, was probably the most important of the group's 55-year history.

Elio Revé, Sr. was an incomparable talent scout. He may also have been a difficult man to work for, if the number of musicians who have left his band is any indication! The incredible legacy of famous Revé spinoff bands began shortly after his group relocated from Guantánamo to Havana in 1956. In 1958, most of the members left to form Ritmo Oriental. In 1965, his young pianist Chucho Valdés left to pursue a jazz career, which resulted in the formation of Irakere. In 1968, Juan Formell, Pupy Pedroso and others left to form Los Van Van. In the late 70s, Armando Gola, German Velazco and Pepe Maza left to form Orquesta 440. Singer Félix Baloy left after 1982 and enjoyed a long career with Adalberto Álvarez and as a solo artist. Arranger Ignacio Herrera also left after 1982. We're not sure what happened to Herrera, but based on his stunning arrangements on the 1982 album, he certainly had the potential to create a brilliant spinoff band of his own. Another "missing-in-action" Revé alumnus who might well extended to this list was Tony García, the pianist and musical director of the early 1990s and the arranger of Revé famous *Mi salsa tiene sandunga* which became the theme song of Cuba television's most important music show, *Mi Salsa*.

**Tumbao 49** is in the style of *Más viejo que ayer, más joven que mañana*, another huge hit that took advantage of the vimi chord. It starts out I – IV – V – V, and then IV – V – vimi – vimi.

### Tumbao 49 – tracks 97 & 98



The first system of musical notation for Tumbao 49 consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#). The treble staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The bass staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern, characteristic of the 2-3 clave. The music is in 2/4 time.



The second system continues the musical notation from the first system. It maintains the same key signature and rhythmic structure, with the treble staff focusing on melodic development and the bass staff providing a consistent rhythmic foundation.



The third system of musical notation continues the piece. The melodic line in the treble staff shows some chromatic movement, while the bass staff maintains the characteristic eighth-note accompaniment.



The fourth system concludes the musical notation for Tumbao 49. It features a final melodic flourish in the treble staff and a concluding rhythmic pattern in the bass staff.

In the style of: Revé: *Más viejo que ayer* – c. 1988 – tempo=83 bpm – 2-3 clave – piano: Juan Carlos Alfonso

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## About the Author

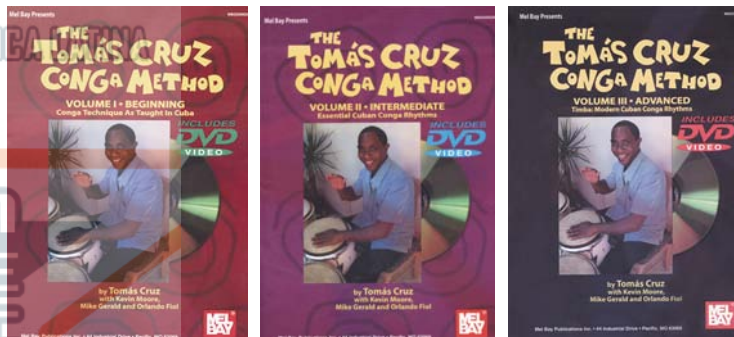


Melón Lewis, Kevin Moore – Los Angeles, 2009

Kevin Moore ([kevin@timba.com](mailto:kevin@timba.com)) is the co-founder and music editor for the world's largest Cuban music website, [www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com), to which he has contributed the free online multimedia book *The Roots of Timba*, dozens of book-length articles, discographies, record analyses, interviews and the daily Cuban music blog *La última*, which is nearing its 10<sup>th</sup> year of publication.

In the early 2000s Kevin co-wrote *The Tomás Cruz Conga Method, Volumes 1-3*, a critically acclaimed method book used as a text at various educational institutions.

## *The Tomás Cruz Conga Method – Volumes 1, 2, & 3*



Published by Mel Bay



As musical director, composer, arranger and violinist of the California-based salsa band Orquesta Gitano he co-produced the 1998 CD *Salsa Gitana*.

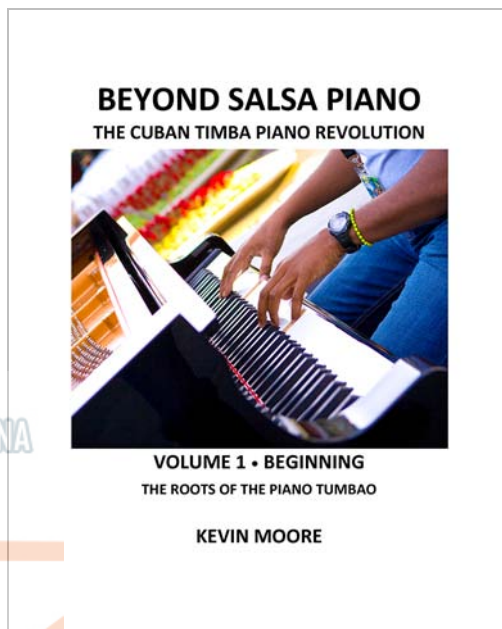


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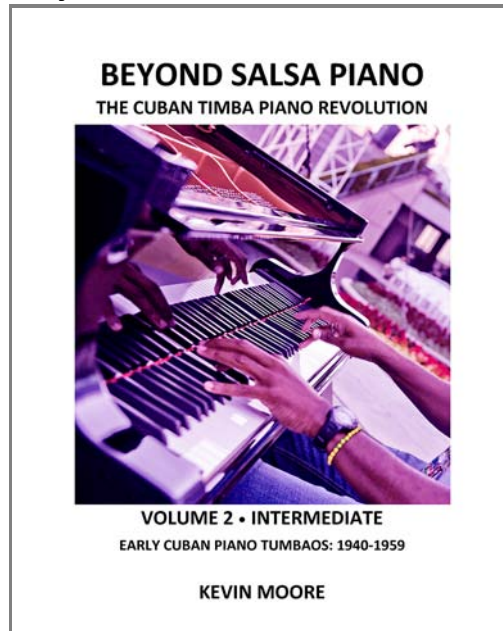
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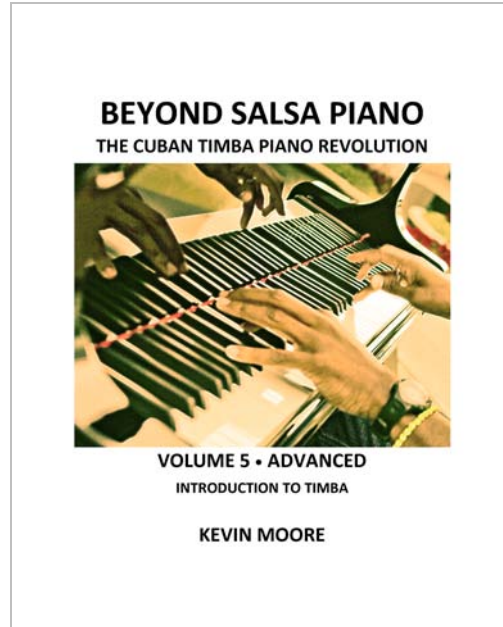
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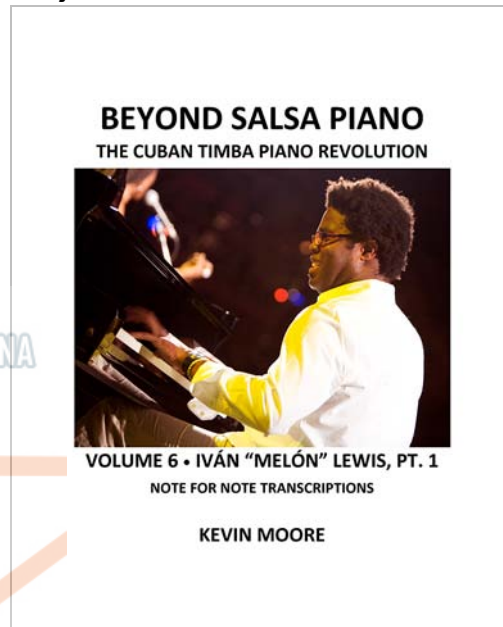


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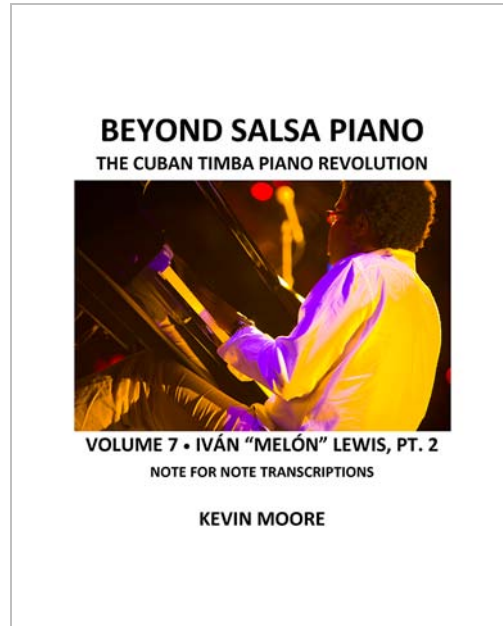
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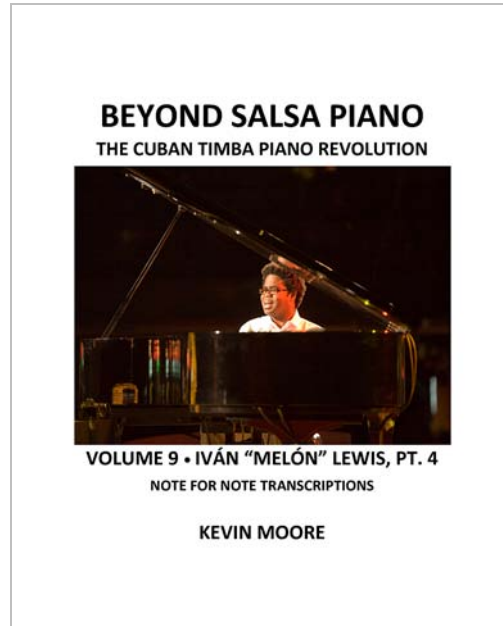
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