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Salsa is a word that inspires an instant reaction in Latin music lovers everywhere. It is the rhythm, the dance, the musical excitement that sends millions of normally sedate non-Latinos to the dance floor where they meet their Latin neighbors, who are too busy enjoying the music to notice.

Birthplace of Salsa:

There's a lot of debate about the place where salsa was born. One school of thought claims that salsa is just a newer version of older, traditional Afro-Cuban forms and rhythms, so the birthplace must be [Cuba](#). In fact, even today many of the old school Cuban musicians adhere to the belief that there is no such thing as salsa. [Tito Puente](#) summed up their general feeling when asked what he thought of salsa by replying: "I'm a musician, not a cook."

But there's little doubt that if salsa had a passport, the date of birth would be the 1960s and stamped under place of birth would be New York, New York.

Evolution of Salsa:

Between 1930 and 1960 there were musicians from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico and South America coming to New York to perform. They brought their own native rhythms and musical forms with them, but as they listened to each other and played music together, the musical influences mixed, fused and evolved.

This type of musical hybridization gave birth to the 1950s creation of the mambo from son, conjunto and jazz traditions. Continuing musical fusion went on to include what we know today as the cha cha cha, rumba, conga and, in the 1960s, salsa.

Of course, this musical hybridization was not a one-way street. The music went back to Cuba, Puerto Rico and South America and continued to evolve there. It evolved a little differently in each place, so that today we have Cuban salsa, Puerto Rican salsa, Colombian salsa, etc. They all have the driving, electric energy that is the hallmark of the salsa form, but they also have the distinctive sounds of their country of origin.

The Name 'Salsa':

The salsa that is eaten in Latin America is added to spice up the food. In this vein, without going into the many apocryphal legends about who was first to use the term, DJs, bandleaders and musicians started using (and yelling) *Salsa!* as they were introducing a particularly energetic musical act or in order to spur the dancers/musicians on to more frenetic activity.

So, much in the same way that [Celia Cruz](#) would shout *Azucar!* (sugar) to spur on the music, *Salsa!* was used to spice up the music and dancing. The term stuck

Salsa Music:

Salsa has its origins in the Cuban [son](#). With heavy use of percussion (clave, maracas, conga, bongo, tambora, bato, cowbell – to name a few), the instruments and the singers often mimic the call and response patterns of traditional African songs, and then segue into the chorus. Other salsa instruments include vibraphone, marimba, bass, guitar, violin, piano, accordion, flute and a brass section of trombone, trumpet and saxophone. Of course, lately electronics have been added to the mix.

Salsa has a basic 1-2-3, 1-2 rhythm; however, to say that salsa is just one rhythm, or one set of instruments is deceiving. It is more a way of marketing the Latin sound to an urban audience in order to get them onto the dance floor and into the clubs. The tempo is fast and the musical energy exuberant.

There is [salsa dura \(hard salsa\)](#) and [salsa romantica \(romantic salsa\)](#). There are salsa [merengues](#), chirisalsas, balada salsas – the list goes on.