



Pearson

Familia Valera Miranda: *Caña Quemada* – ‘Se quemada la chumbambà’ and ‘Alla vá candela’

Background information and performance circumstances

Familia Valera Miranda are a group of traditional musicians from the Oriente (Eastern) part of Cuba, around the town of Santiago de Cuba. Based around Felix and Carmen Valera Miranda, their three sons – Enrique, Raul and Ernesto – and Felix’s brother, Radames, the family perform traditional Cuban music handed down through generations of their ancestors

Their music originated in the lives and experiences of subsistence farmers, Andalusian immigrants, in the East of Cuba (some of whom had slave roots), while other elements have been added recently from branches of the family originating in the Canary Islands

The family’s music first gained attention when it featured in the study/recordings of Cuban musicologist Danilo Orozco – *La Antología Integral de Son*. They released their first album in 1995, *Music from Oriente de Cuba: The Son*, followed by a second, *Cuba: La Familia Valera Miranda*, in 1997. Since *Caña Quemada* (1997) they have released a further three albums.

They have toured extensively since 1995, performing in Europe, USA and Canada, and appearing at Folk and World Music festivals, such as WOMAD. Enrique (‘Kiki’) Valera has established a parallel career as a salsa musician and record producer.

The repertoire

Both songs here are examples of the most important Cuban musical form – the *son* – which, from its rural origins in the 19th century, became nationally popular during the 1920s.

Cuban son is a fusion of musical elements from the Spanish, who colonised Cuba, and from the African slaves that they imported:

- From West Africa this style gets the syncopated, layered rhythms, call and response and the use of percussion instruments that developed from African models.
- From Spanish (European) styles come the use of functional (if limited) chords, as well as the use of guitar, cuatro and double bass.

Originally it was a purely vocal call and response form, but when the *son* began to be used at dances, chordal accompaniment on instruments was added.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

‘Se quema la chumbambà’

The song is about an incident in the family’s history when a piece of land caught fire. It is a *son montuno* (‘mountain son’), which may refer to its rural origins, or to other features of the music, such as the semi-improvised section near the end.

‘Alla vá candela’

The song is concerned with the intense joys of love. It begins as a Cuban bolero, with the tempo increasing to a *son* section, beginning at bar 39.

Performing forces and their handling

The group has the following line-up on these recordings:

- Lead vocals
- Chorus vocals
- Guitar
- Cuatro – an eight-string instrument related to the guitar, with strings tuned in pairs, normally to the notes (ascending) G, C, E and A
- Maracas, bongos, claves.

This is an all-male vocal group, with a leader (*pregón*) and a chorus (*coro*). The *pregón* improvises the verses, while the *coro* refrains, sung in two parts, remain fixed.

The vocal setting is syllabic in both songs.

‘Se quema la chumbambà’ uses quite a limited vocal range. The lead vocals span a minor sixth, while the chorus refrains span a minor ninth in total (between the two parts).

‘Alla vá candela’ has a wider range for the lead vocals, spanning a twelfth in the bolero section but more restricted in the *son* section. The chorus part is restricted to repeated octaves on the note E.

The cuatro plays a mixture of solo melodic lines and strummed chords: the tuning of the four pairs of strings’ tunings produce a thicker sound, with the brightness of the upper octaves ringing through the texture. The cuatro has a short, repeated melodic pattern, a *guajeo*, (a syncopated and arpeggiatic melody which creates an ostinato) which acts as an introduction, in both songs. This also acts as an accompaniment to the singing. The cuatro solos, in both pieces, are more adventurous, covering a much wider range and including slides and chords as well as individual notes.

The guitar provides a chordal, accompaniment role in both songs, playing syncopated block chords while the plucked double bass plays a line with only a small number of notes, mostly from the dominant and tonic chords.

The percussion section, in typical Latin American style, uses continuous maracas quavers and improvised bongo patterns, all held together by the characteristic 3:2 *son* clave rhythm in ‘Se quema la chumbambà’ and the (mostly) 2:3 *son* claves rhythm in ‘Alla vá candela’.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

Structure

‘Se quema la chumbambà’

After the four-bar *cuatro* introduction, which presents a *guajeo* used throughout the song, there is a regular succession of eight-bar *pregón* ‘verses’ (which change each time in detail) and eight-bar (mostly) unvaried *coro* ‘refrains’. This pattern is sometimes slightly varied by the *pregón* singing a virtually unchanged version of the *coro* refrain, both lyrically and melodically.

The lengthy *cuatro* solo (and the bongo improvisation within it) provides variety and the piece is rounded off by a short coda, based on the *coro* refrain. There is no key contrast or modulation.

‘Alla vá candela’

‘Alla vá candela’ falls into two sections

- 1–39 Bolero
- 39–163 *son*.

Introduction	Bars 1–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two-bar <i>cuatro</i> before guitar, bass and percussion join in at bar 3• <i>Cuatro</i> plays pre-echo of vocal melody in bars 3–13 with anacrusis
Vocal idea A	Bars 15–23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally lower tessitura
Vocal idea B	Bars 25–31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Idea overlaps into <i>son</i> section
Vocal idea C	Bars 32–38	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tempo increases• Bars 33–62 repeated• Two-bar idea reappears at bar 120
Vocal refrain	Bars 39–60	
<i>Cuatro guajeo</i> link	Bars 62–67	
<i>Cuatro</i> solo section	Bars 68–119	
<i>Cuatro guajeo</i> link	Bars 120–123	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accompanies bongo solo

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

Vocal refrain	Bars 124–137	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First heard at end of bolero
Vocal idea C	Bars 138–144	
Vocal refrain	Bars 145–163	

Tonality

‘Se quema la chumbambà’

- A diatonic G minor throughout, without any modulations.

‘Alla vá candela’

- A diatonic E major throughout, also without modulation.

Harmony

‘Se quema la chumbambà’

- Very limited chords used – just I and V⁷ in G minor in a regular four-bar pattern which repeats throughout:

$$I (Gm) V^7(D^7) V^7(D^7) I (Gm)$$
- However, the frequent use of the note E \flat over the D⁷ chord does make the harmony slightly richer, implying either the dominant minor ninth chord, or, at times the diminished seventh chord.
- In the cuatro solo section, the cuatro itself uses a wider range of chords, sometimes as sliding parallel progressions as part of a chordal figure, and sometimes the major subdominant chord (C maj).

‘Alla vá candela’

- A wider range of chords is used in the bolero section, where E and B⁷ (I and V) chords are varied with the use of A and F \sharp ⁷ (IV and V of V) and with an E⁷ (I⁷) at bar 28 .
- The *son* section reverts to simple alternations of tonic and dominant chords (E and B⁷).
- As in ‘Se quema la chumbambà’, the cuatro solo section expands the effective harmonic vocabulary by the use of chromatic inflections in the melodic line, and by the use of some extensions (the high C \sharp in bars 100–104 creates E⁶ and B^{7/9} chords).

Melody

‘Se quema la chumbambà’

- The main ‘riff’ played in the introduction by the cuatro features two sequentially related phrases, both of which feature rising and falling thirds prominently. Balanced two- and four-bar phrases are a major feature of the vocal sections of this piece.
- The vocal refrain ‘Candela es’ is similar each time it occurs, beginning on either the third or fifth of the tonic chord in the first phrase, to land on an unprepared seventh (C) in the second bar. The second phrase begins on the supertonic, which leaps to the dominant before falling to the tonic.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

- Most of the ‘improvised’ *pregón* phrases move to the upper dominant (D) and sometimes also move to E \flat before falling again to the tonic.
- The melodic language of the cuatro solo is much more varied, with a wider range and use of all the notes of the harmonic G minor scale. In addition, a chromatic C \sharp is used quite frequently, normally as a chromatic inflection onto the dominant. Later in the solo, there is a greater use of E, and F as well, as the player strays a little further from the harmonic pattern implied in the vocal sections.

‘Alla vá candela’

- The cuatro melody from bars 4–12 and the vocal idea A from bars 15–23 share the same basic shape and structure. The melodic shape combines triadic shapes with up and down stepwise motion. In both, the initial upward fourth is repeated and is therefore emphasised.
- Vocal idea B from bars 25–31 appears only once. It is generally lower and moves largely by step (apart from the upward fifth at bar 27 and downward fifth into bar 31).
- Vocal idea C covers a wider range. It ascends an octave in its first phrase (second inversion arpeggio of E major) and then descends to its starting note as it connects to the next section.
- The vocal refrain idea is a simple repetition of notes of the E major triad (tonic) and the outer notes of the B major chord (dominant).
- The two-bar cuatro *guaejo* at bars 39–40 uses larger intervals (descending sixth) and notes outside the harmony (C \sharp in bar 39).
- The cuatro solo is very flexible melodically. It uses triadic shapes, stepwise motion, larger leaps (bars 85–86), chromatic inflections (bars 69, 72) and all notes of the chromatic scale are used in bars 82–83.

Rhythm and metre

‘Se quema la chumbambà’

- There is a strong feeling of two in a bar, but heavily syncopated, so that the position of the first beat is sometimes ‘disguised’.
- All the rhythms fit to the *son* claves 3:2 rhythm (see bars 9 and 10 in the score). This rhythm, which is present or implied throughout, is vital in most Latin American styles, and it derives from African rhythms brought over as a result of the slave trade.
- The bass line anticipates the beat by putting the root of the chord on the fourth crotchet beat – this is normally termed an ‘anticipation bass’.
- The cuatro solo varies the rhythmic divisions of the beat by including triplet crotchets as well as quavers and syncopations.
- Each vocal phrase begins on the second crotchet of the bar, while the fourth bar always uses three ‘straight’ crotchets to anchor the rhythm back to the beat briefly.

‘Alla vá candela’

- Although transcribed here into 4/4 – the opening bolero section is heard in 2/2 metre at a medium tempo at about 80 beats per minute. (Cuban boleros are in *duple* time, unlike their more famous Spanish counterparts, which tend to be in triple metres.)
- The *son* section moves into a very clear two in a bar metre, at 90 bpm.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson’s interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

- The rhythm is underpinned by the percussion rhythms, which mainly interlock around the two-bar 2:3 clave rhythm, occasionally moving to the 3:2 clave in response to other aspects of the performance, including sections of irregular length.
- The bass line plays a very 'square' rhythm in the bolero and a more syncopated line during the *son*.
- The vocal lines are syncopated throughout, sometimes creating some quite complex cross-rhythms.
- The cuatro solo has the most complicated rhythmic language with frequent syncopations, triplets, hemiola figures (bars 103–104) and rapid quaver figurations.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson's interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom. There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.