Chapter 1
Introduction to Latin Styles

Getting to grips with syncopation

Playing Latin music styles is a pleasure for pianists all over the world, but for [illegible] must to really enjoy this music, they must be comfortable with syncopation, [illegible] playing [illegible] the beats. In order to master syncopation it is important to understand [illegible] differences between 'upbeats' and 'downbeats'.

All music has a pulse, as defined by the time [illegible]. The [illegible] establishes the note value of each pulse, so that (for example, a bar of [illegible] in 4/4 time has four pulses or beats), each of which is a quarter note ('crotchet' in the UK).

These beats are called the 'downbeats'. [illegible] simple [illegible] features the downbeats correspond to the clicks of the metronome [illegible] your foot-[illegible]

- a bar of music in 4/4 [illegible] 4 [illegible]
- a bar of music in 3/4 time [illegible]
- a bar of music in 5/4 time has [illegible] beats

NB. In classical [illegible], the [illegible] downbeat [illegible] refers to the first beat of the bar only, whereas in Latin music (and [illegible]) [illegible] refers to [illegible] that is on the beat.

Notes in between [illegible] downbeats are called 'upbeats'. If the downbeats are counted as 1, 2, 3, etc, the [illegible] are counted [illegible] in between.

Fig. [illegible] Downbeats alternating [illegible] in a bar of 4/4

In unsyncopated music, the downbeats generally receive greater emphasis, the first beat of every bar being [illegible] longest. Eighth-note syncopation occurs when this emphasis is displaced onto the upbeat [illegible] accented notes in the above example.

Eighth-note syncopation

To get used to finding and emphasizing the upbeats in a stream of eighth notes ('quavers' in the UK), try the following clapping exercises whilst looking at Fig 1.1:

- Say the numbers out loud and clap the 'and's
- Repeat for a few bars until you're comfortable with the rhythm
- Clap only on the 'and' after beats 2 and 4
- Clap only on the 'and' after beats 1 and 3
- Tap your foot on every downbeat, clap the 'and's as above

Our first piece *On The Upbeat* (overleaf) explores eighth-note syncopation in the right hand against a left hand which remains on the first and third downbeats of the bar.

PREVIEW
Low Resolution

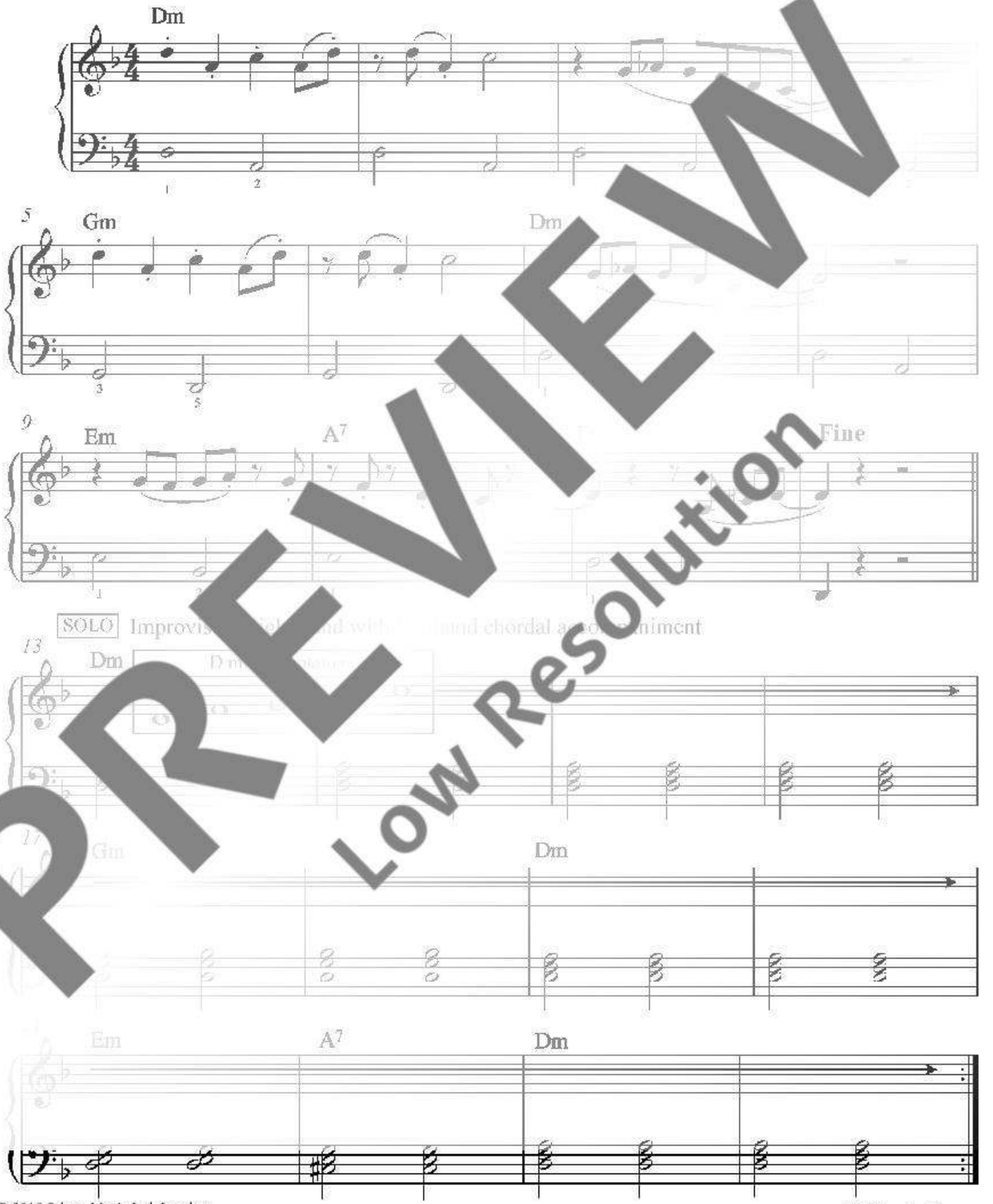
Photo © Getty Images

CD1 1 ♩ = 100

On the Upbeat

Tim Richards

This simple twelve-bar tune in D minor incorporates eighth-note syncopation in the right-hand melody. The bass line uses only the Root and 5th of each chord, on the first and third downbeat of each bar. Tap your foot and make sure the left hand doesn't follow the right-hand syncopations.



PREVIEW
Low Resolution

© 2010 Schott Music Ltd, London

Checkpoint *On the Upbeat*

● **Bass line** If you adopt the given fingering, you can cover all the notes you need with hardly any movement, which means you won't need to look at the left hand. Start the piece with your left little finger and thumb an octave apart (both on D), the middle finger on G (ready for bar 5).

● **Foot-tap** Set your metronome to 100 bpm and tap your foot in sync with it throughout. The left-hand bass notes must always coincide exactly with every other click.

● **Solo section** The 12-bar chord sequence of the melody repeats here, with left-hand chords as an alternative to the bass line. Practise both melody and solo over both types of left hand. When playing with a bass player, it is usually better to play chords in the left hand rather than doubling the bass line.

Assignments *On the Upbeat*

1. Melody Practise the right hand alone, with a foot-tap, until you're sure you have mastered the syncopated rhythms. It's important that the foot-tap remains constant (but the upbeat of it will follow the right-hand upbeats.

2. Hands together Slowly at first, put the hands together. You might want to practise the 12-bar section over and over before attempting to play the first 12 bars without stopping.

3. Chords in the left hand Now play the melody with left-hand chords instead of a bass line, using the shapes given in bars 13–24. This is how it is played after the melody take sure the chords are all on the beat.

4. Improvisation Try making up some syncopated right-hand phrases, as shown for the solo section, with either the bass line or the chords in the left hand. Use the chords in the five notes given in the box, which form a minor pentatonic scale:

Fig 1.2 D minor pentatonic (five-note) scale

If these notes sound familiar, that's because the melody was based on this scale too! The A♭ and C♯ in the melody are optional passing notes.

5. Play along Having played the melody and solo with your metronome, turn it off and try playing them at the same time as the melody. Listen to the solo and work out some of the notes and phrases used.

Improvisation Notes

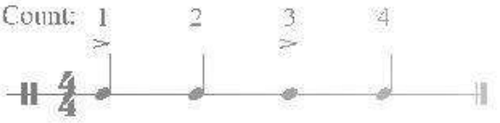
In this and the other pieces in this book, we will sometimes suggest note choices for your solos, shown in a scale. Indicate that no rhythm is specified. You can play the notes in any order, any register and any rhythm. You don't even have to use all of them – let your ears judge which sound best at the given point. The arrows indicate that the scale can be used over the whole 12-bar sequence, without changing any notes.

PREVIEW
Low Resolution

Quarter-note syncopation

Syncopation doesn't always involve eighth notes – it can occur even when none are present. When a bar of unsyncopated music in 4/4 contains four quarter notes, the emphasis is normally placed on 'one', with the next strongest being on 'three' – 'two' and 'four' are normally weak beats.

Fig 1.3 Normal distribution of accents for 4/4 quarter notes



If the emphasis is displaced onto the second or fourth beats, this is quarter-note syncopation.

Fig 1.4 Syncopation displaces the accents onto 'two' and 'four'

Try the following exercises whilst looking at Fig 1.4:

- Say the numbers aloud, clap on beats 2 and 4
- Repeat for several bars to make sure you are comfortable
- Count out loud, snap your fingers on 2 and 4
- Repeat whilst tapping your foot on the downbeats

The more you repeat this, the easier it becomes. If you do it for several minutes, you might start to get a little bit bored, your mind is drifting to other subjects – this is a good sign! It means that the rhythm has become so ingrained that you do it without conscious thought – it has become *instinctive* or *second nature*, like walking or riding a bike.

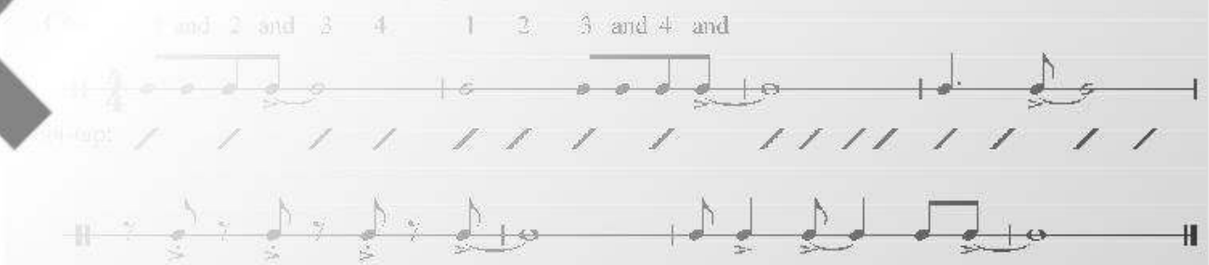
Both quarter-note eighth-note syncopation are important components, not only of Latin music, but also of jazz, so you find more, given these styles much of their intrinsic rhythmic vitality.

Assignment: Syncopation

To make sure you've grasped the types of syncopation, try the clapping exercises below. All syncopated notes are shown with accents to indicate how they're often tied to the next note, and take care not to clap the notes in the

1. Syncopated eighth notes: Clap or tap the following passage several times, until you are confident everything is in place. Keep a steady foot tap going underneath, so you can feel where the downbeats fall, and count out loud if necessary.

Fig 1.5 Syncopated eighth notes occur when an upbeat is accented

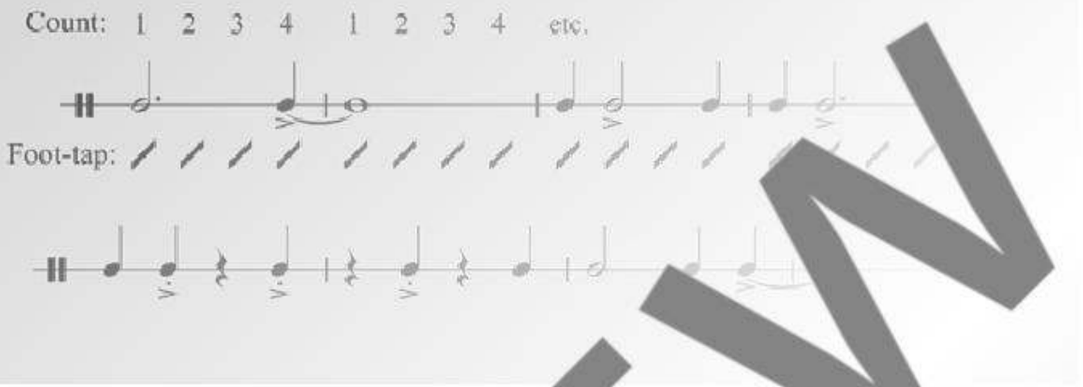


PREVIEW
Low Resolution

Photo © Tom Ehrlich

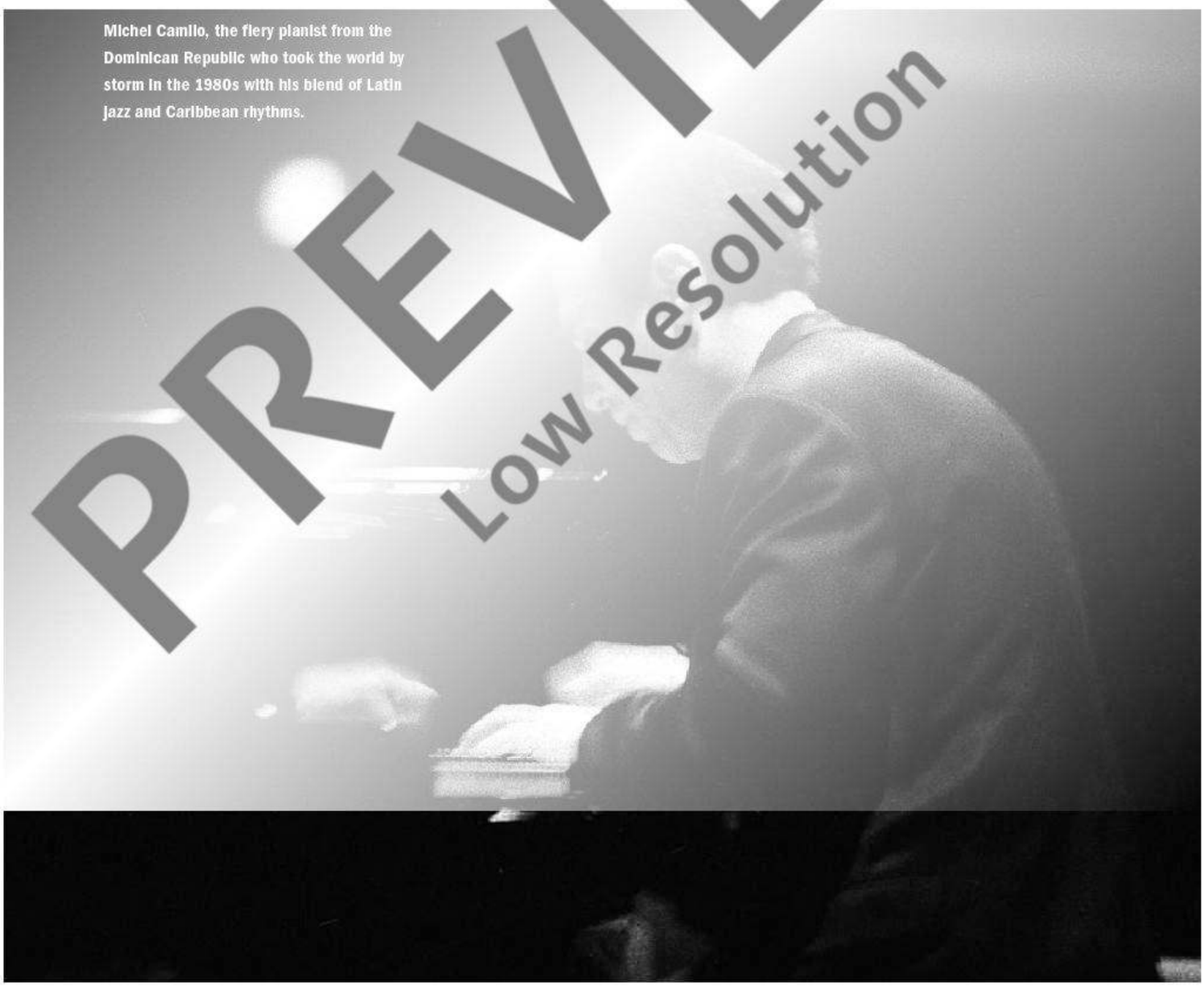
2. Syncopated quarter notes There are no upbeats in the following passage, so you won't need to say any 'and's. Clap, tap and count as above.

Fig 1.6 Syncopated quarter notes occur when 'two' or 'four' are accented



The next tune *On the Downbeat* (overleaf) features [illegible] hands.

PREVIEW
Low Resolution



Michel Camilo, the fiery pianist from the Dominican Republic who took the world by storm in the 1980s with his blend of Latin jazz and Caribbean rhythms.