

# BEYOND SALSA PIANO

THE CUBAN TIMBA PIANO REVOLUTION



**VOLUME 6 • Iván “Melón” Lewis, Pt. 1**

**NOTE FOR NOTE TRANSCRIPTIONS**

**by Kevin Moore**

photography by Tom Ehrlich

cover photo subject: Iván “Melón” Lewis

audio and video companion products available at [www.timba.com/piano](http://www.timba.com/piano)

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[kevin@timba.com](mailto:kevin@timba.com)

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# Introduction to the Series

## How the Series is Organized and Sold

Each volume of *Beyond Salsa Piano* consists of two or three separately sold products:

- 1) a book like this one with text and musical notation (hard copy or eBook)
- 2) downloadable MP3 audio files demonstrating the musical examples, accompanied by a clave click track, at full-speed and in slow motion, with the left and right hands panned hard left and right
- 3) when available, downloadable computer video files showing a Cuban pianist performing each musical example at full speed, in slow motion, and with variations

You can choose any combination of the three to fit with your personal style of learning.

### Book

The book you're reading now can be purchased at [www.createSpace.com/3427351](http://www.createSpace.com/3427351) as a hard-copy bound paperback book. Alternatively, it can be viewed online and/or printed on your computer's printer from the website [www.timba.com/piano](http://www.timba.com/piano). The books contain music notation for each exercise in both 8<sup>th</sup> notes (American-style) and 16<sup>th</sup> notes (Cuban-style), as well as explanatory text and historical information. If you don't read music and aren't interested in the explanations and history, you can choose to buy only the audio and/or video products.

### Audio

The audio files do not come with the book. They're available as a separate downloadable product from [www.timba.com/audio](http://www.timba.com/audio). For each notation example, there are two ultra-high quality MP3 files made directly from 24-bit wave files. The first is recorded at normal tempo and the second in slow motion at 50 beats per minute. Each file begins with a countoff consisting of four main beats on the bell and one cycle of clave. After the countoff, the bell drops out while the clave continues. The right and left hand piano parts are separated and panned hard right and left respectively. This way, you can use the balance control to solo just one hand. The audio files can be burned to audio CDs or played on an MP3 player. If you have audio on your computer, I highly recommend taking advantage of the new generation of computer programs which will allow you to change the tempo and/or key of any of these audio files and to loop them to fit your style of practice. Particularly useful are: Amazing Slowdowner™, Transcribe!™ and Emulator X®, all of which can be downloaded from their respective companies' websites.

## Video

The video product, like the audio product, will be available as a separate download from [www.timba.com/audio](http://www.timba.com/audio). There will be one video file for each exercise. The pianist is expected to be Iván “Melón” Lewis, one of the greatest Cuban pianists of all time and the subject of Volumes 6, 7, 8 and 9. Melón plays each exercise slowly, then at full speed, and finally adds variations such as he might use in a live performance.

## Series Overview

*Beyond Salsa Piano* is a history and anthology of the role of the piano in the Cuban rhythm section – from its first appearance to the present. In a broader sense, it’s a study of the *tumbao* – the art of creating music from layers of repeating rhythmic and melodic phrases. Whether these syncopated figures are called tumbaos, *guajeos*, *montunos*, riffs or vamps, this Afro-Cuban concept lies at the heart of nearly every popular music genre from salsa to rock , funk, R&B, hip-hop and jazz.

While presented as a set of method books, the series doubles as a history course and record-collecting guide for listeners, dancers, and players of instruments other than the piano.

Perhaps the most important goal of the series is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how tumbaos are constructed, their central role in the texture of Latin music of all eras, and the endless possibilities they provide for creative composing and arranging.

**Volume 1** begins around 1900 and covers the origins of the tumbao concept using exercises adapted from genres – such as *changüí*, *danzón*, and *son* – which pre-date the use of piano as the primary instrument for tumbaos in Cuban music. This material is designed to be playable by near-beginners, players of other instruments, and arrangers seeking to acquire a basic facility on piano.

**Volume 2** covers the period from 1940-1959, during which the piano became a constant and dominant presence in nearly every Latin rhythm section and during which Cuban music had a profound global influence on all forms of popular music. The difficulty level ranges from beginning to intermediate.

**Volumes 3 and 4** cover the eclectic period between the Cuban Revolution and the Fall of the Berlin Wall – from 1959 to 1989.

**Volume 5** introduces the *timba* genre that began in the 1990s. It includes a history and discography of the era, a detailed description of rhythm section “gears”, a list of the most important piano innovations of the 1990s, and finally a series of 32 instructional tumbaos, all on the same chord progression, demonstrating these innovations.

From this **Volume 6** onwards, each book concentrates on the style of one Cuban pianist, with note-for-note transcriptions, based in most cases on MIDI files performed by the pianist in question. For

example, the subject of Volumes 6 through 9 will be Iván “Melón” Lewis, the phenomenally innovative pianist who played with The Issac Delgado group from 1995 to 1998.

## Introduction to Volume 6

In 1999 I began a project of meeting with almost all of the major modern Cuban pianists and recording MIDI files of them playing tumbaos along with a clave click track. I also collected written transcriptions and made some of my own. All told I have enough material for at least 30 volumes on Cuban piano masters of the 1990s and beyond. A companion series, *Beyond Salsa Percussion*, is also planned.

The styles of the leading pianists, while they share certain characteristics, are profoundly different. Each volume, beginning with this one, will cover the work of a single pianist. As we progress through the various giants of the era, I expect that the reader will be as excited as I was to discover that the tumbaos of, for example, Melón Lewis, Tirso Duarte and Juan Carlos González, are nearly as different and varied as the sonatas of Beethoven, Chopin and Mozart. Each represents a colorful pianistic world unto itself, fully worthy of an independent study.

We’ll begin with Iván González Lewis, better known simply as “Melón”. Melón was active on the Havana timba scene for only about three and a half years, but in that short time, he achieved legendary status. In the voting for the timba.com readers’ award for Best Pianist of All-Time he came in second only to Los Van Van icon Pupy Pedroso.

By the time of Melón’s arrival on the scene in late 1994, many of the piano innovations discussed in Volume 5 were already in practice in the work of César “Pupy” Pedroso, Rodolfo “Peruchín” Argudín, Juan Carlos González and Tony Pérez, all of whom will eventually be the subjects of their own volumes in this series. Melón assimilated and extended these innovations and added more of his own, but the most dramatic characteristic of his style was the degree to which he was able to improvise within the rhythm section context of playing piano tumbaos. We devote special attention to this concept of “controlled improvisation” over the course of the four Melón volumes, which cover most of the important tumbaos from his Cuban recordings and live performances. If these volumes are well-received I hope to convince Melón – now living in Spain – to provide material for additional volumes, perhaps developing new educational approaches based on feedback from readers.

As the timba pianists revolutionized the concept of the piano tumbao, a similar transformation was occurring in Cuban bass playing. Each of Pupy Pedroso’s innovative piano tumbaos was created in tandem with a Juan Formell bass tumbao. Peruchín played with the groundbreaking bassist Feliciano Arango, the first to popularize bomba slides and many other timba bass innovations. Juan Carlos González played with Pedro Pablo Gutiérrez, who brought an unprecedented degree of melodicism to Latin bass playing. But it was Issac Delgado, in mid-1996, who engineered the most celebrated

piano and bass pairing of the 90s when he teamed Melón with a young virtuoso bassist named Alain Pérez. Each was the era's most complete musician on his instrument; each was a brilliant and prolific arranger; each was equally comfortable playing jazz and dance music; and both shared a unique gift for improvising within the groove to create a style that was perfectly suited to Delgado's flexible and adventurous approach to live performance.

There are many measures by which timba bands can be compared, and by changing the metric, a powerful "greatest of all time" argument could be made for at least half a dozen Havana bands of the 90s, but in terms of marrying the infectious pop genius of timba with the freedom and sophistication of Latin jazz, no one before or since has approached the level of the live performances of the Delgado group with Melón and Alain Pérez. To try to capture some of this magic, we've included, in addition to our usual tumbao transcriptions and analyses, a number of improvised passages to help the reader understand how a pianist can use harmonic and rhythmic freedom to enhance pop music without losing any of its funky, visceral, danceable appeal.

To hear this band, other than the studio recording *Exclusivo para Cuba*, look for an off-brand DVD entitled *Festival*, various audio concerts floating around among collectors, and a possible reunion tour that's been discussed for the 2010 decade. Also check [www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com) for updates.

## Chapter 3: Note for Note Transcriptions

### *No me mires a los ojos*

#### *No me mires a los ojos 1a - basic - tracks 1 & 2*

#### *No me mires a los ojos 1a - basic - tracks 1 & 2*

Our first tumbao is a very famous one, and a perfect example of the most critical timba piano innovation – the idea that the piano tumbao be a “hook” by which the song can be identified and that contributes greatly to the song’s popularity. If you play the above tumbao, *No me mires 1a*, for any timba fan, the person will immediately know which song it’s from.

Examining the hands separately reveals another major timba piano innovation: there are three places where the left hand adds an extra note between two right hand notes, a technique never used before timba. No one seems to know who came up with this idea first, but as we’ll see shortly, Melón was the first to use it as a central part of his style.

### **Melón’s Fingering of Right-Hand Octaves**

With regard to playing octaves in the right hand, some pianists play them, as expected, with the thumb and pinkie (fingers 1 and 5). Melón, however, often uses 1 and 4 when the octave is played on black keys, switching to the normal 1 and 5 for white key octaves. Try both methods to see which works best for your hand size. If your hand can’t reach an octave, play only the top note and experiment with the settings on your keyboard to try to approximate the timbre of playing in octaves.

**No me mires a los ojos 1b - variation - tracks 3 & 4**

**No me mires a los ojos 1b - variation - tracks 3 & 4**

**No me mires 1b** is presented as a loop for learning purposes, but Melón never played this variation more than once in succession. It's used to add variety and rhythmic tension, especially during the *presión* (piano breakdown) sections. Also see Volume 5, Estudio 10 for more on this rhythmic figure.

**No me mires a los ojos 1c - fill - tracks 5 & 6**

**No me mires a los ojos 1c - fill - tracks 5 & 6**

**No me mires 1c** is another example of a variation that's normally only played once in succession, and often during a piano breakdown. In actual practice you would loop tumbao 1a, occasionally throwing in one repetition of tumbao 1b, or tumbao 1c, or another variation, or allow them all to blend into controlled improvisation.

We'll have more on controlled improvisation in the next chapter and a lot more on the subject in Volume 8 in the section on *Por qué paró*.

# Appendix 3: For Further Study

## Suggested Reading

### Earlier Volumes of this Series:

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 1 – The Roots of the Piano Tumbao*, by Kevin Moore

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 2 – Early Cuban Piano Tumbaos: 1940-1959*, by Kevin Moore

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 3 – Cuban Piano Tumbaos: 1960-1979*, by Kevin Moore

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 4 – Cuban Piano Tumbaos: 1979-1989*, by Kevin Moore

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 5 – Introduction to Timba*, by Kevin Moore

### Later Volumes of this Series:

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 7 – Iván “Melón” Lewis, Pt. 2*, by Kevin Moore

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 8 – Iván “Melón” Lewis, Pt. 3*, by Kevin Moore

*Beyond Salsa Piano, Vol. 9 – Iván “Melón” Lewis, Pt. 4*, by Kevin Moore

### Overview:

*Cuba and its Music*, by Ned Sublette, Chicago Review Press

*The Clave Matrix*, by David Peñalosa, Bembe Books

[www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com)

### Discography:

Cristóbal Díaz-Ayala (<http://latinpop.fiu.edu/discography.html> )

[www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com)

### Afro-Cuban Folkloric Music and Tumbao Time Feel:

*The Conga Drummer’s Guidebook*, by Michael Spiro, Sher Music

(downloadable at [www.latinpulsemusic.com](http://www.latinpulsemusic.com))

### Traditional Salsa Piano:

The *Salsa Guidebook*, by Rebeca Mauleón-Santana, Sher Music

*101 Montunos*, by Rebeca Mauleón-Santana, Sher Music

### Timba:

*The Tomás Cruz Conga Method, Vols. I-II-III*, by Tomás Cruz, Kevin Moore, Mike Gerald and Orlando Fiol, Mel Bay Publications

*Text to Tune Alignment in the Music of Charanga Habanera*, by Ryan Mead - Honors Thesis at Stanford University, 2007. Available at: [ryanmead.com/Thesis.pdf](http://ryanmead.com/Thesis.pdf)

[www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com)

## Suggested Listening to Prepare for Subsequent Volumes

\*\* indicates album download (w/full booklet) is available on [www.latinpulsemusic.com](http://www.latinpulsemusic.com) as of 2010.

This list is chosen for both overall musical quality and relevance to the tumbaos and pianists that will appear in future volumes of the “Beyond Salsa Piano” series.

GROUP	ALBUM	PIANIST	LABEL
Paulito FG y su Élite	<i>Con la conciencia tranquila</i>	Sergio Noroña	Nueva Fania **
	<i>Paulito FG (El bueno soy yo)</i>	Emilio Morales	Nueva Fania **
Bamboleo	<i>Yo no me parezco a nadie</i>	Lázaro Valdés	Ahí Namá **
	<i>Ya no hace falta</i>	Lázaro Valdés	Ahí Namá **
	<i>Ñññño!</i>	Lázaro Valdés	Ahí Namá
Charanga Habanera	<i>Hey You Loca</i>	Juan Carlos González	Magic Music **
	<i>Pa' que se entere La Habana</i>	Juan Carlos González	Magic Music **
	<i>Tremendo delirio</i>	Juan Carlos González	Magic Music **
	<i>Charanguero mayor</i>	Tirso Duarte	Ciocan Music **
	<i>Live in the USA</i>	Tirso Duarte	Ciocan Music **
	<i>Chan Chan Charanga</i>	Tirso Duarte	Ciocan Music **
Danny Lozada	<i>Tanto le pedí</i>	Juan Carlos González	
Issac Delgado	<i>Rarities (Exclusivo para Cuba)</i>	Iván Melón Lewis	Ciocan Music **
	<i>El año que viene</i>	Iván Melón Lewis	RMM
	<i>Otra idea</i>	Iván Melón Lewis	RMM
	<i>La primera noche</i>	Pepe Rivero	ARTEX**
	<i>La fórmula</i>	Roberto Carlos	Ahí Namá **
Manolín	<i>Para mi gente</i>	Chaka Nápoles	Ahí Namá **
	<i>De buena fe</i>	Chaka Nápoles	Blue Metro
	<i>Jaque mate</i>	Chaka Nápoles	Caribe
	<i>El puente</i>	Chaka Nápoles	Ciocan Music **
Los Van Van	<i>Disco Azúcar</i>	Pupy Pedroso	ARTEX **
	<i>Lo último en vivo</i>	Pupy Pedroso	QBADisc
	<i>Ay dios, ampárame</i>	Pupy Pedroso	Caribe Records**
	<i>Esto te pone la cabeza mala</i>	Pupy Pedroso	Caribe Records **
	<i>Llegó Van Van</i>	Pupy Pedroso	Pimienta Records **
	<i>Chapeando</i>	Roberto Carlos	Unicornio Records **
NG La Banda	<i>En la calle</i>	“Peruchín” Argudín	QBADisc
	<i>Simplemente lo mejor de NG</i>	“Peruchín” Argudín	ARTEX (BIS) **

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>ALBUM</b>	<b>PIANIST</b>	<b>LABEL</b>
Klímax	<i>Mira si te gusta</i>	Tony Pérez	Eurotropical
	<i>Juego de manos</i>	“Huicho”	Eurotropical
	<i>Oye como va</i>	Marcos Crego	Eurotropical
Klímax and Manolito	<i>Concierto Eurotropical I</i>	“Huicho”/Manolito	Eurotropical
Manolito y su Trabuco	<i>Directo al corazón</i>	Manolito Simonet	Bembé Records
	<i>Contra todos los pronósticos</i>	Manolito Simonet	Eurotropical
	<i>Marcando la distancia</i>	Manolito Simonet	Eurotropical
	<i>Para que baile Cuba</i>	Manolito Simonet	Eurotropical
	<i>Se rompieron los termómetros</i>	Manolito Simonet	Eurotropical
	<i>Hablando en serio</i>	Manolito Simonet	EGREM
Los Que Son Son	<i>Qué cosas tiene la vida</i>	Pupy Pedroso	EGREM
	<i>La buenagente</i>	Pupy Pedroso	Pimienta Records
	<i>Mi timba cerrá</i>	Pupy Pedroso	EGREM
	<i>Tranquilo que yo control</i>	Pupy Pedroso	EGREM
Revé y su Charangón	<i>Se sigue comentando</i>	Roy Alain Sain	BIS**
	<i>Fresquecito</i>	Wilfredo Naranjo, Jr.	BIS**
Azúcar Negra	<i>Andar andando</i>	Aisar Simón	BIS**
Michel Maza	<i>Fieesta</i>	Sergio Noroña	Envidia**
	<i>Que hablen los habladores</i>	Sergio Noroña	Envidia**
Angel Bonne	<i>Circunstancias</i>	Yaniel “El Majá”	EGREM
	<i>Bonne &amp; Bonne Co.</i>	Wilfredo Naranjo, Jr.	EGREM
Various	<i>Gracias Formell</i>	Melón Lewis, Emilio Morales	Ciocan**

For suggested listening within the 1960-1989 time period, please see the Discography and Online Book sections of the Timbapedia section of [www.timba.com](http://www.timba.com).

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## About the Author

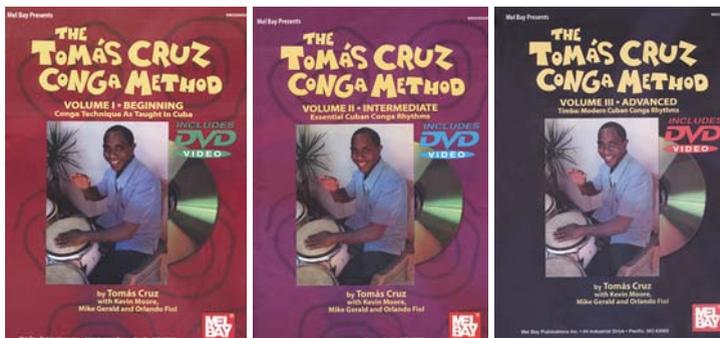


Melón Lewis, Kevin Moore – Los Angeles, 2009

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, and 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*.

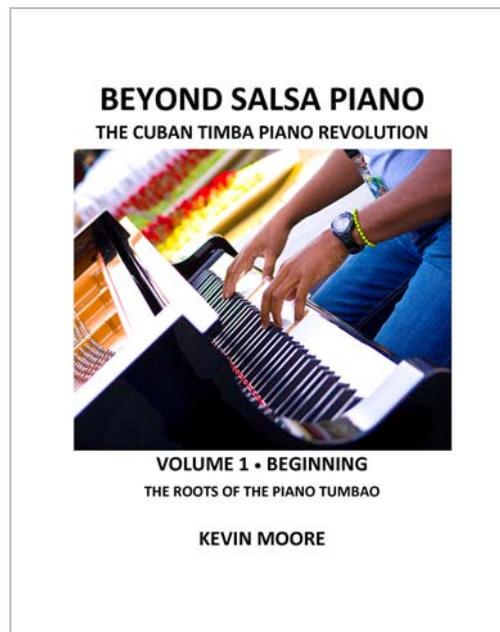


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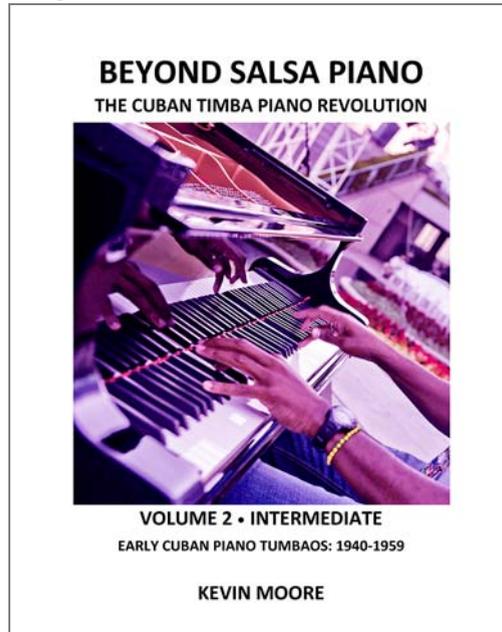
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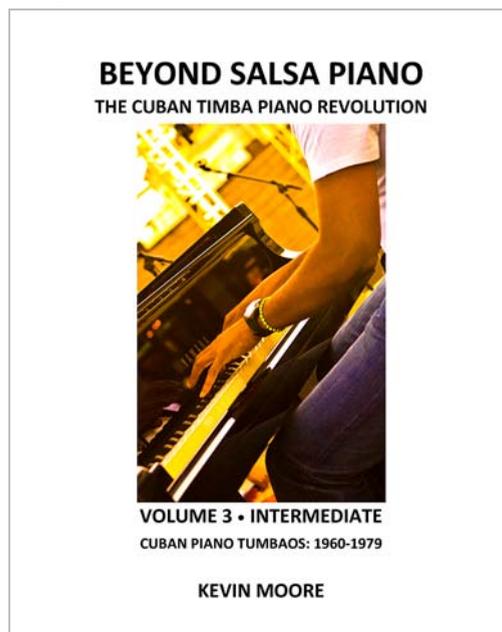
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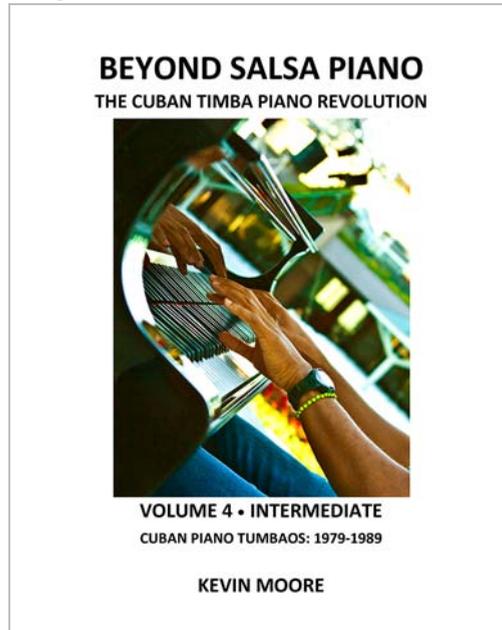


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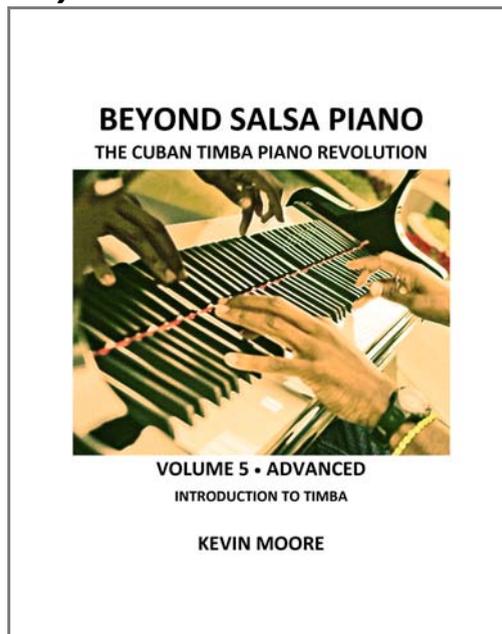
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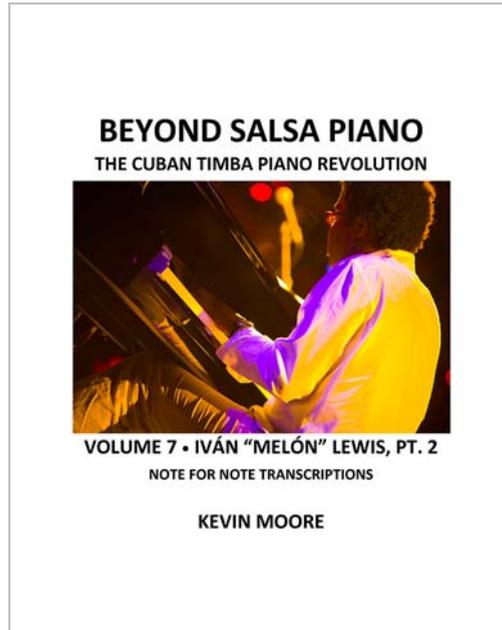


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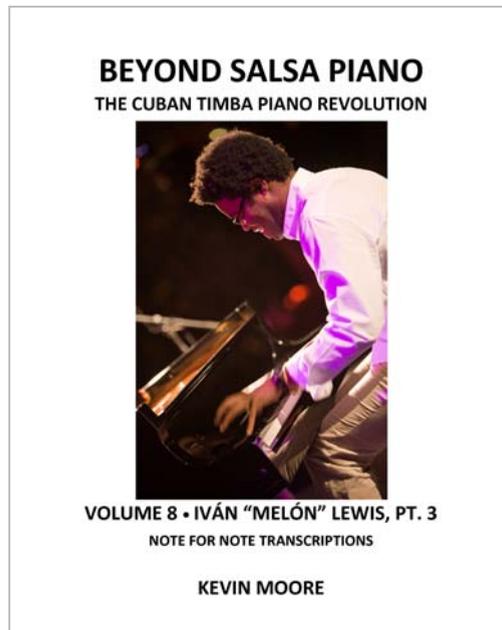
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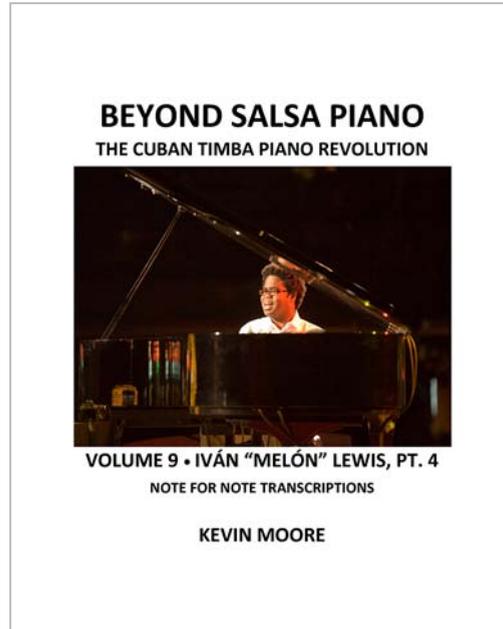


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