

DOUGLAS LORA

Brazilian Rhythms



WORKBOOK

Difficulty: Advanced

tonebase Guitar

Lesson Description

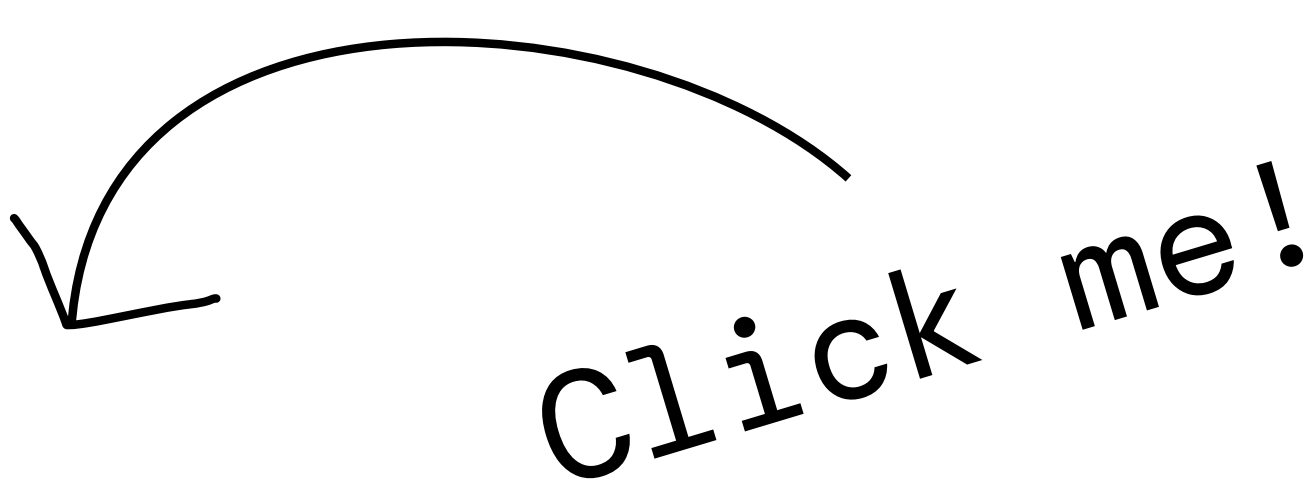
Award-winning guitarist and composer Douglas Lora introduces his connection and admiration for Brazilian rhythms and forms. The samba is one of the best gateways into Brazilian rhythms. The independence between bass and accompaniment figures in samba is present in most other styles of Brazilian music. Douglas Lora discusses the foundation of samba's rhythmic patterns and demonstrates how to apply them on the guitar. The maxixe is considered by many as the first authentically Brazilian genre. Douglas Lora demonstrates how combining independent rhythmic cells in the bass and accompaniment can result in a variety of distinctive maxixe rhythms.

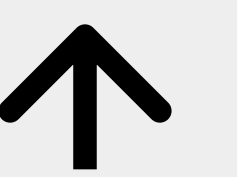
What You'll Learn

- Introduction to Brazilian rhythms
- Levadas (grooves) to play on guitar
- How these rhythms developed
- Chord sequences using each rhythm

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If you have questions about the content discussed in these lessons, **Mr. Lora has made himself available** at the following email address: douglaslorabrazilianmusic@gmail.com

These lessons will explore some of the Brazilian rhythms common to the classical guitar repertoire. Douglas Lora's experience with Brazilian music as a performer and teacher spans almost two decades. For those who grew up with this music, the learning process is organic, nearly unconscious. People in Brazil are surrounded by syncopated rhythms in their daily lives. The key to understanding the music is to feel it in your body, and incorporate the syncopation directly from the sound and the movements.

Writing these rhythms on a music staff adds an obstacle to a complete understanding of these sounds. **It's of utmost importance to listen to a lot of music in these styles.** When you listen to an authentic samba group, a martial band playing maxixe, or a forró trio playing baião, you will be learning directly from the source, and the musical information that you are getting will be very rich, consistent, and reliable.

Lora will also share how he built his right-hand patterns for each rhythm (informally called "levadas" in Portuguese), gathering accents and patterns mostly from percussion instruments. This will provide you tools for developing your own levadas and, importantly, to make you familiar with how to perform these rhythms if you encounter them in a classical piece.

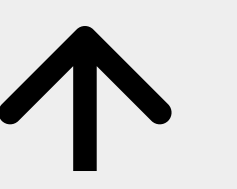
Among Brazil's vast array of genres, we will talk about four of the more well-known and recurrent rhythms in classical guitar repertoire: samba, maxixe, choro, and baião.



*Morro do Cantagalo –
Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro*

Samba: Overview

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The rhythms of Brazilian music are complex by their very nature; they each consist of several rhythms that occur simultaneously. These layers are usually present in the percussion instruments in the original style, almost always with syncopation. The guitar allows us to reproduce these polyrhythms with characteristic accentuations and articulations. The results are unique right-hand patterns, called *levadas*, or grooves.

The samba is one of the most accessible gateways into the vast universe of Brazilian rhythms. Here we find syncopation and independence between the bass and trebles, two primary elements that hold throughout most of the other rhythms that we'll explore.

Samba is also among the most emblematic of the rhythms from Brazil. Born in the streets of Rio de Janeiro in the early 20th century, the samba emerged from a convergence of African populations, European dances brought by the Portuguese, and the music of the indigenous population. The samba groove in the guitar synthesizes two instruments and their essential rhythmic cells: the **surdo** (bass) and the **tamborim** (trebles). The thumb (*p*) will be responsible for the role of the surdo. The index, middle and annular fingers (*i, m, a*) perform the tamborim part.



surdo (bass)



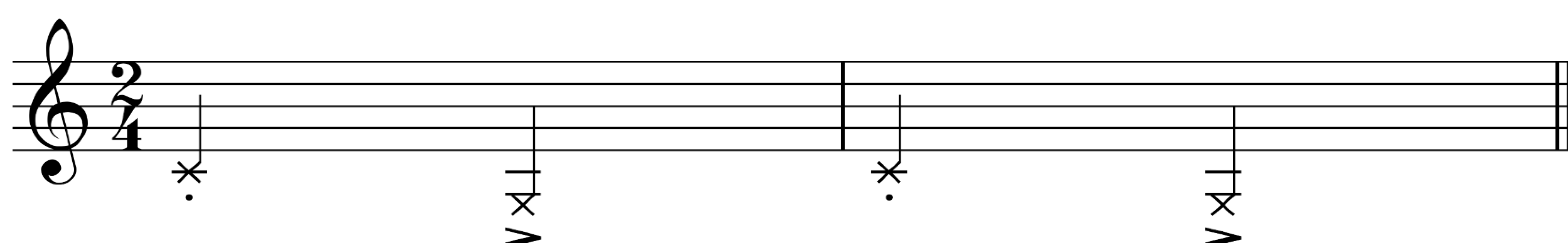
tamborim (trebles)

Samba: Basic Patterns

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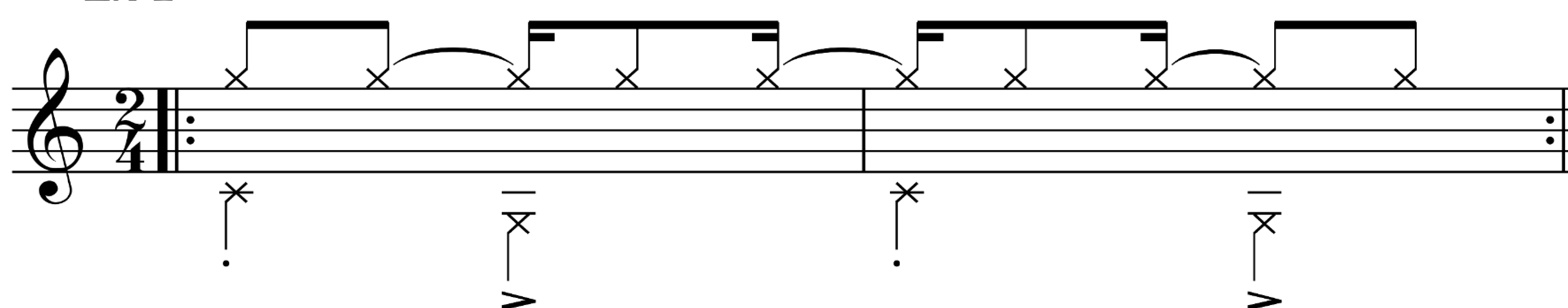
Samba is a binary rhythm in 2/4. One of the most important characteristics of the samba is that the second beat is the strongest. **The first beat is shorter and weaker (representing the muffled skin of the surdo), and the second beat is longer and heavier (loose skin).**

The same principle will be applied to the bass notes played by the thumb on the guitar. Controlling the length and strength of these notes is essential. Usually, although not necessarily, the lower fifth of the chord is played on the second beat – a trick used by guitarists and bass players to reinforce this distinct accentuation. (Lora uses a seven-string guitar, but it's ok to use a fifth above a given root if you are limited by range. Just be sure never to accentuate the first beat.)



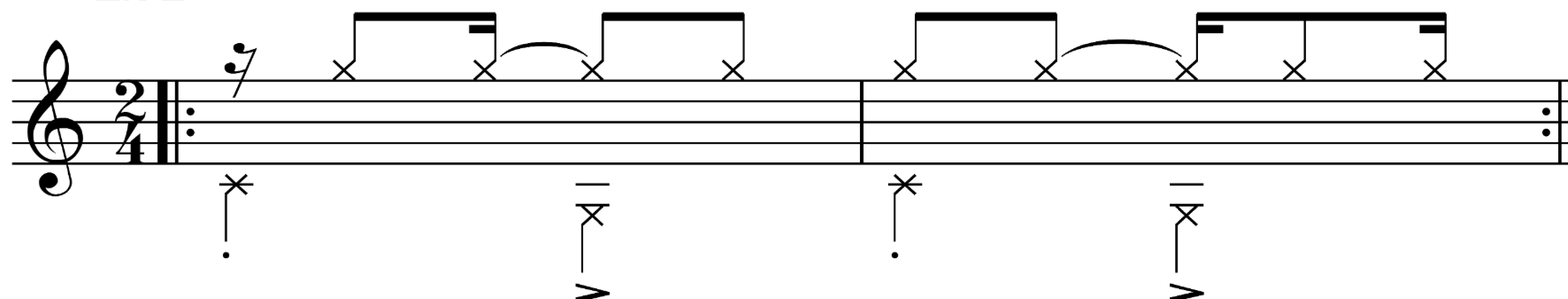
surdo bass pattern

Ex 1



*tamborim pattern
starting on the downbeat*

Ex 2



*tamborim pattern
starting on the upbeat*

The tamborim pattern lasts for four beats, taking two measures for one complete cycle. There are two ways that we can execute this pattern. The first way is notated in Example 1, where we have eighth notes subdivided into the first and last beats of the two-measure cycle, with syncopations in the middle. The other way of playing this pattern (Example 2) is simply moving the starting point to the second measure – resulting in the syncopations on the extremities and the eighth-note subdivisions in the middle.

Choosing which of the two patterns to use depends upon the melody of the tune. The melodic accents will define the most appropriate pattern in the accompaniment. When the melody starts or ends with a syncopation or anticipation, the second example will fit better. **These patterns should always be played flexibly**, with variations, adjusted to fit the melody. Don't let the rhythms be entirely static throughout a tune.

Below are links to two recordings featuring each of the two patterns (they're rather fast!):

Pattern 1 (starting on downbeat):

Diabinho maluco – Jacob do Bandolim e Época de Ouro

[YOUTUBE](#) 

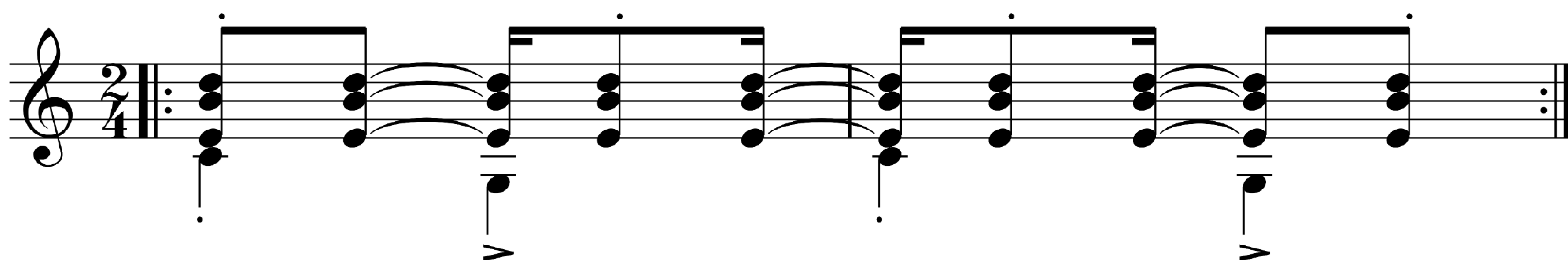
Pattern 2 (starting on upbeat):

Receita de Samba – Jacob do Bandolim e Época de Ouro

[YOUTUBE](#) 

Let's apply the first pattern to some harmonic contexts!

Initially, the tamborim pattern will be executed by fingers *i*, *m*, and *a* simultaneously, as a block. At this point, avoid chords with open strings to facilitate the left-hand staccatos. The chord in the example below is Cmaj7(add9):



When playing faster, it's much easier to play staccatos with the left hand. This is recommended at all tempos, though you can play them with the right hand if necessary while playing slower.

When the harmony changes in a samba groove, it's typical for the body of the chord (the upper structure) to be played first, followed by its bass. Here's an example:

Example of chord change technique: Cmaj7(add9) to Dm7(add9). The notation shows the upper structure of the first chord being played first, followed by its bass, then the upper structure of the second chord, followed by its bass. A red vertical bar highlights the transition point.

In the examples below, you will find a typical sequence of four chords in both tamborim patterns for practice:

Pattern 1

Pattern 1: Cmaj7(add9), Dm7(add9), C#o, G7(add13).

Pattern 1: Cmaj7(add9), Dm7(add9), C#o, G7(add13).

Pattern 2

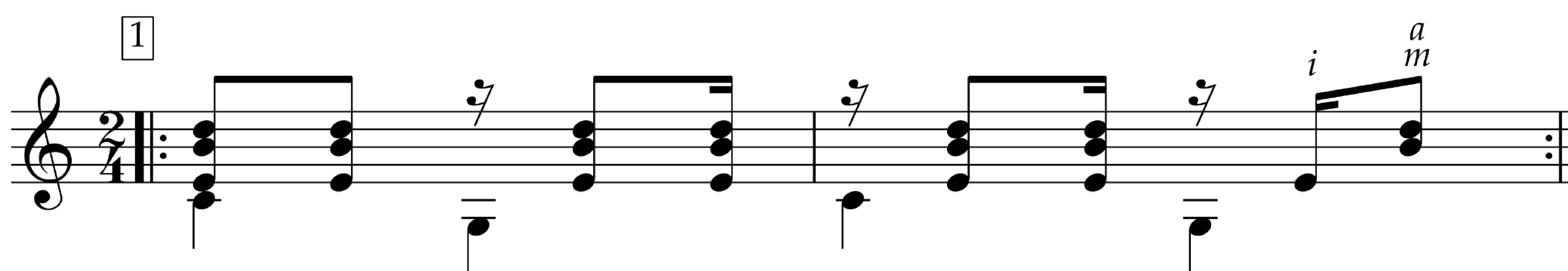
Pattern 2: Cmaj7(add9), Dm7(add9), C#o, G7(add13).

Pattern 2: Cmaj7(add9), Dm7(add9), C#o, G7(add13).

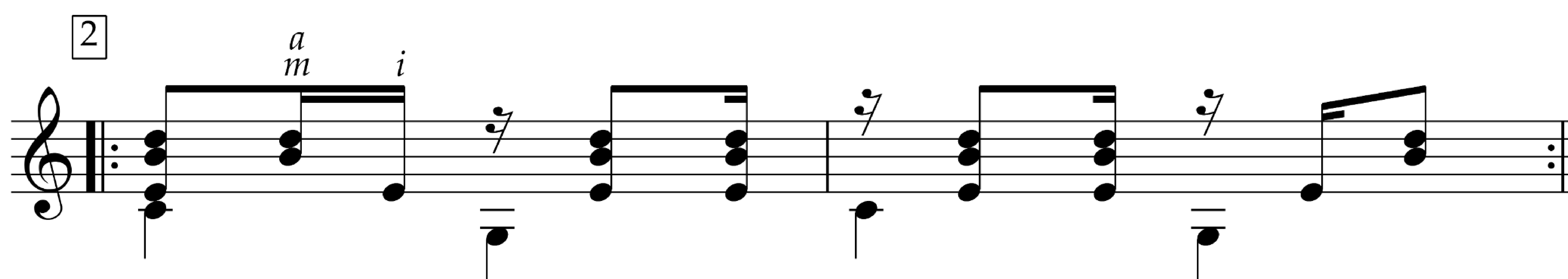
Samba: Advanced Patterns

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Now we'll start to add notes to our Levada, searching for rhythmic enrichment and a fuller sonority. Stepping back to practice with one chord only, we'll first add one note to the last beat of the second measure, separating the *ima* block in two: playing the index finger first, followed by middle and ring finger (variation 1). The result is one added note at the end of the second measure:



Going further, we'll add another note in the first beat of the first measure, this time with an inverted separating movement: middle and ring finger first, followed by index:



These variations can be applied in different spots according to your own creativity. It's helpful to understand the aspects of the groove when you play samba in some context, either as an accompaniment or in a solo piece. These fundamentals will help you get a good feel of the rhythm as a whole.

Below are some great examples of samba rhythms in the classical guitar repertoire:

“Danza Brasileira” by Jorge Morel

We have the samba pattern clearly stated in the first measures — an excellent opportunity to establish the mood and the pace of the whole piece. The weight on the second beat here is vital!

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“Sambadalu” by Marco Pereira

This piece is a beautiful example of how the accentuations of the samba patterns are present even when not written on the score. The syncopations will be much more relaxed and natural if you can feel the first half of the pattern underneath the written notes.

[YOUTUBE](#) ↑

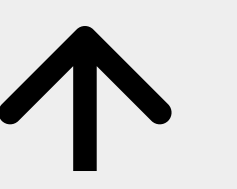
“Lamentos do Morro” by Garoto (Aníbal Augusto Sardinha)

Again, the weight felt on the second beat is essential.

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Below is a typical samba chord sequence. [Practice along with Lora in the video!](#)

1. 2.



Some historians define the maxixe as the first authentically Brazilian genre. Its origins are related to a couple's dance, very sensual and extravagant, and it became popular in the ballrooms of Rio de Janeiro by the end of the nineteenth century. At first, the maxixe was banned from the more traditional segments of society due to its lustful characteristics. But eventually, it was accepted at all levels and became a national fever, replacing the polka.

Resulting from a union between polka and lundu, with elements from the African batuque and the habanera, little by little, the maxixe was consolidated as a musical genre.

One of the most significant contributors to the establishment of the genre was composer and pianist Ernesto Nazareth. The rhythmic elements of the maxixe were structured in his large body of works for piano solo, principally in the accompaniment played by the left hand.

The genre was also significantly represented by military bands, civil bands, carnival bands, and community musical associations, where it was performed with wind and percussion instruments.



*Ernesto Nazareth, Brazilian
composer and pianist*

The maxixe had a fundamental role in the birth of the samba, and it is performed in the choro repertoire by the characteristic ensembles: the Regionais (we will talk more about these groups in the next class). Curiously, the first samba ever recorded, “**Pelo Telefone**” (Donga, 1916), sounds much closer to a maxixe than to samba as we know it.

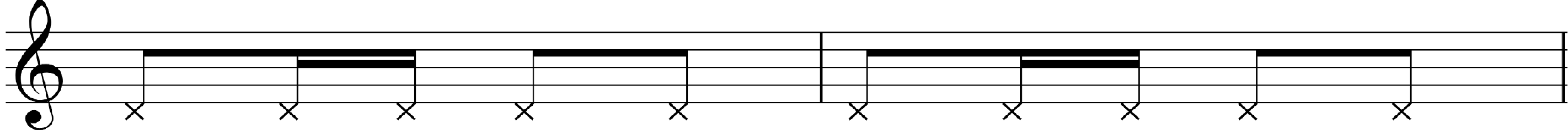
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Maxixe: Basic Patterns

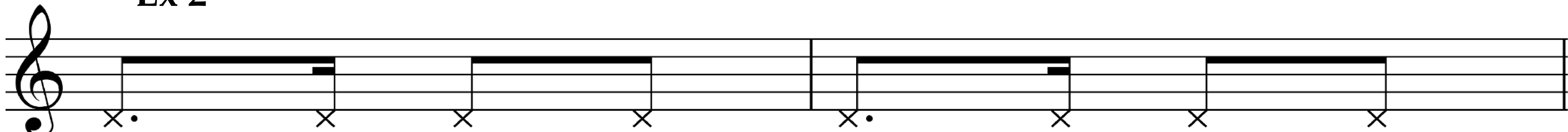
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The most distinctive rhythmic element of the maxixe happens in the bass line, present in the left-hand patterns from Nazareth’s piano pieces, as well as in the brass and percussion instruments in the military bands. The melodies are usually very syncopated. You’ll notice that **the second beat of most measures is stamped by two eighth notes**, sort of like a more syncopated polka:

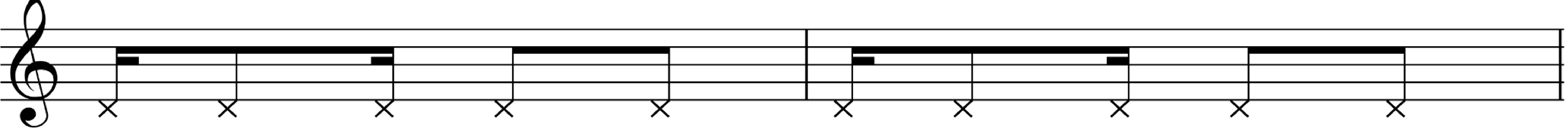
Ex 1



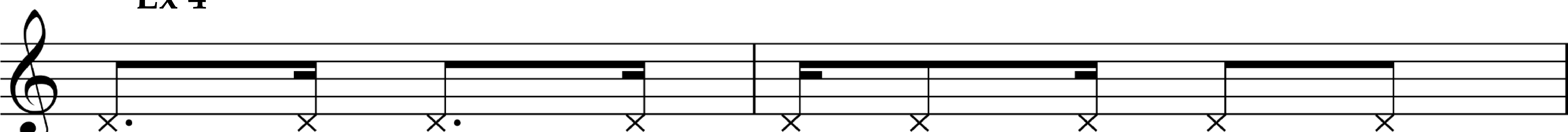
Ex 2



Ex 3



Ex 4



“Jocotó” (Roque Silveira)

Clap the variations from the previous page on top of this recording from 1974. performed by the Band of Military Police of the state of São Paulo.

[YOUTUBE](#) 

The secondary component of the maxixe is the elements traditionally played by the snare drum, or the accentuations by the **pandeiro** and the **cavaquinho**.

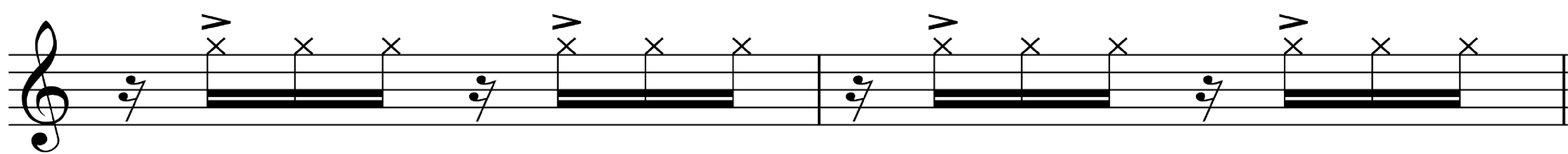


pandeiro

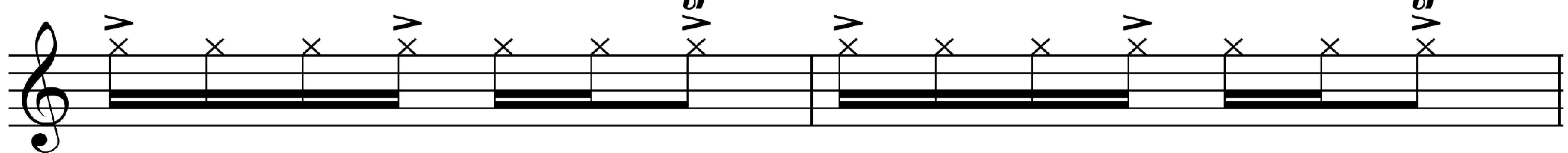


cavaquinho

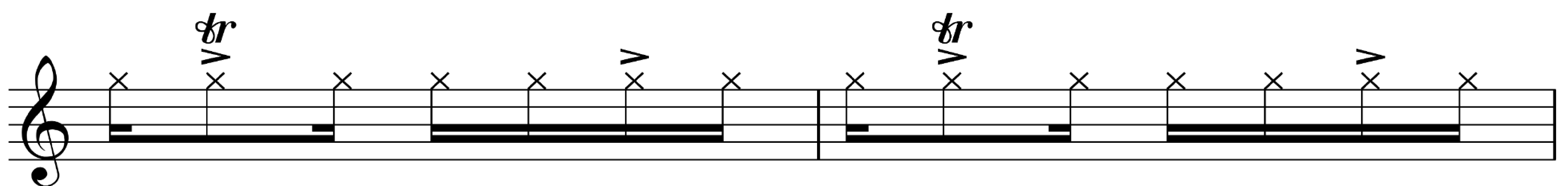
Ex 1



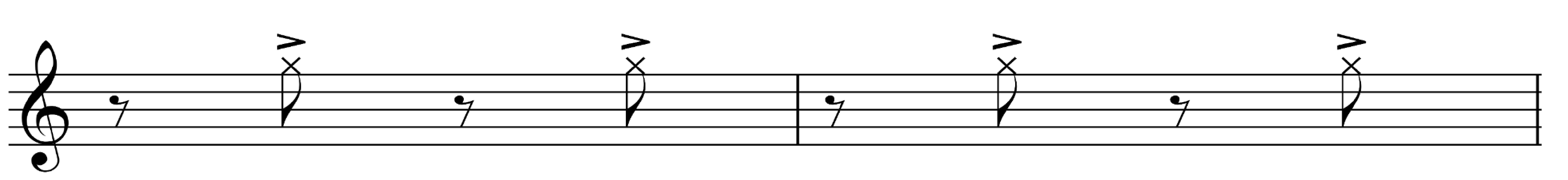
Ex 2



Ex 3



Ex 4



We can freely use these elements as we play. Creativity and spontaneity are large components of Brazilian music!

“O bom filho à casa torna” (Zé da Velha and Silvério Pontes)

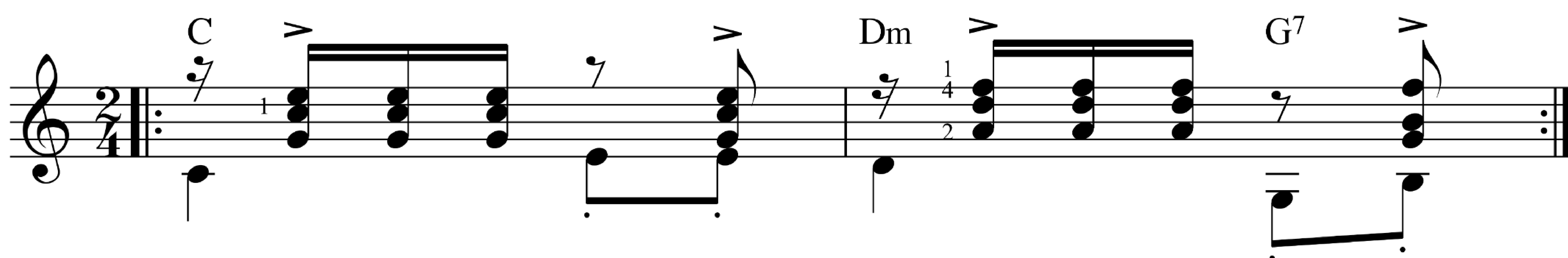
[YOUTUBE](#)

Here is a maxixe in the context of a Regional group, with pandeiro, cavaquinho, guitars, and winds. Clap and sing the previous page’s secondary patterns over the top of this recording.

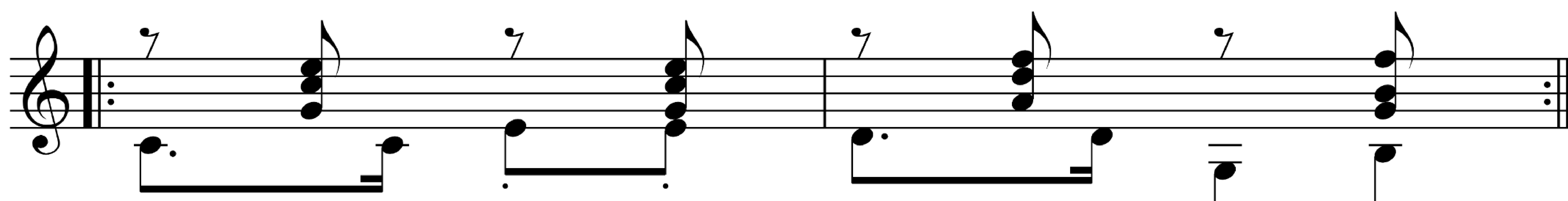
This groove is very similar to the choro in that there is an accentuation on the second sixteenth note. The critical distinction of maxixe is that the second beat is divided into two eighth notes.

Below are the four *levadas*, or grooves, that we can construct on the guitar from these rhythms:

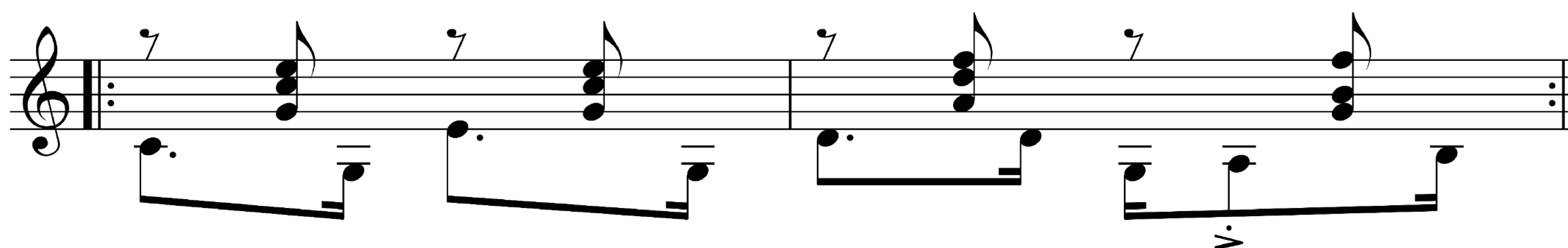
Ex 1



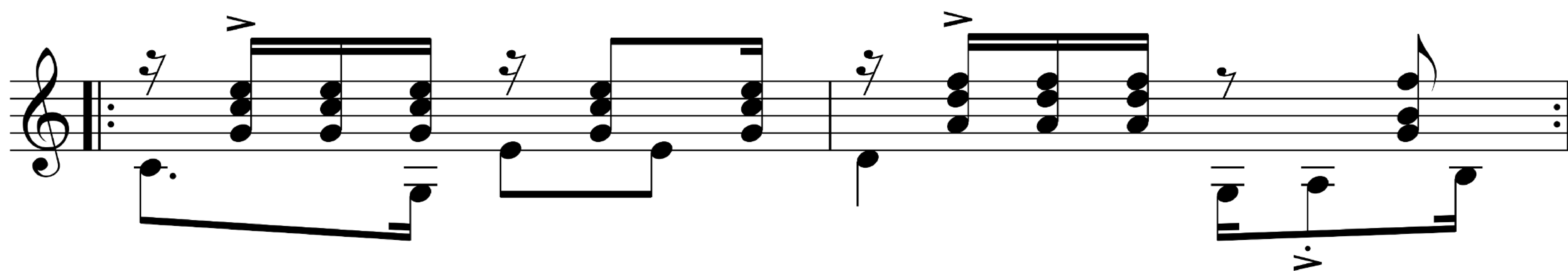
Ex 2



Ex 3



Ex 4

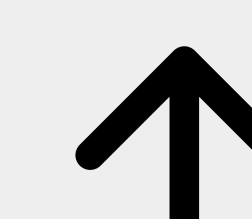


Often, playing the syncopated eighth notes in the bass with a staccato marking will give the feeling of a deeper groove! Start practicing the simple grooves above before moving on.

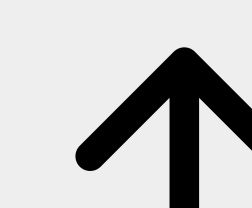
Maxixe: Examples from the Repertoire

[WATCH LESSON](#)

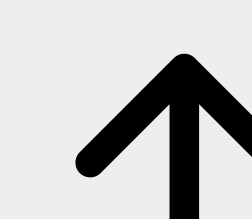
For example, **Villa Lobos's "Choros No. 1"** is a choro with a strong maxixe flavor. When we get to the third part, the pattern of the maxixe is clearly stated. We can take advantage of these articulations that are unique to the maxixe to create variety in the interpretation:

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Another famous piece in the guitar repertoire is **Barrios's "Maxixe,"** strongly influenced by Ernesto Nazareth's style. If you play the first two measures with the patterns and the character in your head, it will automatically sound more groovy.

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Finally, another favorite among the Brazilian repertoire is **"Sons de Carrilhões"** by João Pernambuco, who probably had his share of influence on Barrios's explorations into Brazilian music. The fundamental rhythm (dotted eighth, sixteenth, two eighths) permeates a large portion of this composition.

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Here is a chord sequence that highlights typical rhythms of maxixe. [Practice along with Lora in the video, first playing the written exercise.](#) Then, be free with the rhythms while maintaining the feel.

The musical score is written for guitar in 2/4 time, featuring a sequence of chords and rhythmic patterns across four staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into four systems, each containing two staves. The chords and their corresponding rhythmic patterns are as follows:

- Staff 1:** G, G/B, D7/A, D7, G, G/B, D7/A, D7. The rhythm consists of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some measures containing a half note.
- Staff 2:** B7, B7/D#, Em, E/B, A7, A7/E, D7, D7/A. The rhythm consists of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some measures containing a half note.
- Staff 3:** G, G/B, D7/A, D7, G, G/B, D7/A, D7. The rhythm consists of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some measures containing a half note.
- Staff 4:** B7, B7/D#, Em, A7, A7/E, D7, D7/A, G. The rhythm consists of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some measures containing a half note.

Choro: Overview

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Choro may be the most authentic style of Brazilian music. The term “choro” initially referred to an interpretative character, bursting with lyricism, creativity, and virtuosity. Middle-class musicians from Rio de Janeiro freely appropriated the European dances brought to the Portuguese court: polkas, mazurkas, waltzes, schottishes, and others. All this was then “spiced up” with the strong influence of African rhythms.

The typical choro ensembles called **Regionais** feature melodic instruments for the soloist part, such as flute, mandolin, and clarinet. The **cavaquinho** plays harmony and rhythm, the **pandeiro** is the primary percussion instrument, and the six and seven-string guitars are responsible for the harmony and the countermelodies in the bass. These countermelodies, called “baixarias,” are strongly characteristic of choro.

Choro pieces typically use a rondo form (ABACA or ABA), where each part is in a different key and contains its own complex harmonic scheme. Lora always suggests starting with choros for students interested in learning tonal harmony since they can provide a broad and practical understanding of basic harmonic relationships.

A great example of this formal structure is found in **Villa Lobos’s “Suite Popular Brasileira.”** In each movement, there are three parts, one in each key with a clear harmonic structure.

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early Conjuntos Regionais



Let's listen to a short fragment of "**Pérolas**," a tune written by **Jacob do Bandolim**, performed by the composer and his regional called "**Época de Ouro**." Notice the counterpoint happening in the bass guitar:

[YOUTUBE](#) ↑

The baixarias came from the counterpoint created by **Pixinguinha** on the saxophone and transcribed for the seven-string guitar by Horondino José da Silva, who defined how to play this instrument in the regionais ensembles.

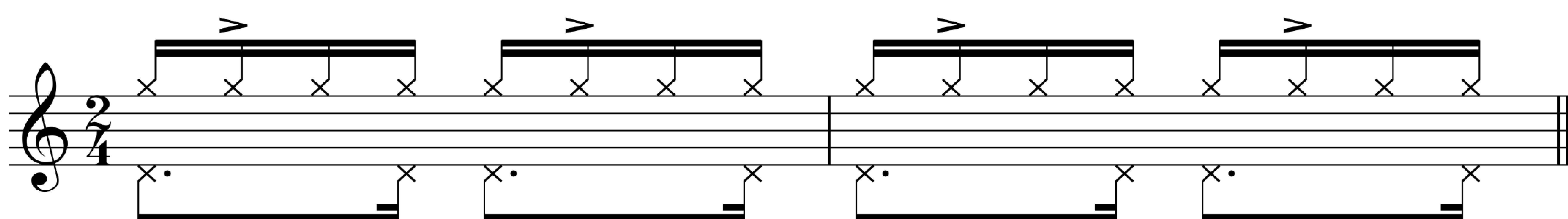
Here is Pixinguinha playing some counterpoint for flutist Benedito Lacerda and the "**Regional do Canhoto**" (1950s) on "**Tico-Tico no Fubá**" (Zequinha de Abreu):

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Choro: Basic Patterns

[WATCH LESSON](#) ↑

These are examples of the general aesthetics of the choro as a genre, with melodies and countermelodies on top of a rich rhythmic setting. But the word choro also designates a specific rhythm within its own repertoire, one that could be either fast, moderate, or slow (slow choros are called "choro-canção"). Choros have this basic outline:



"Vibrações" by Jacob do Bandolim

Here is an example of a slow choro performed by the composer himself and his regional, **Época de Ouro**:

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“Vou vivendo” by Pixinguinha

[YOUTUBE](#) 

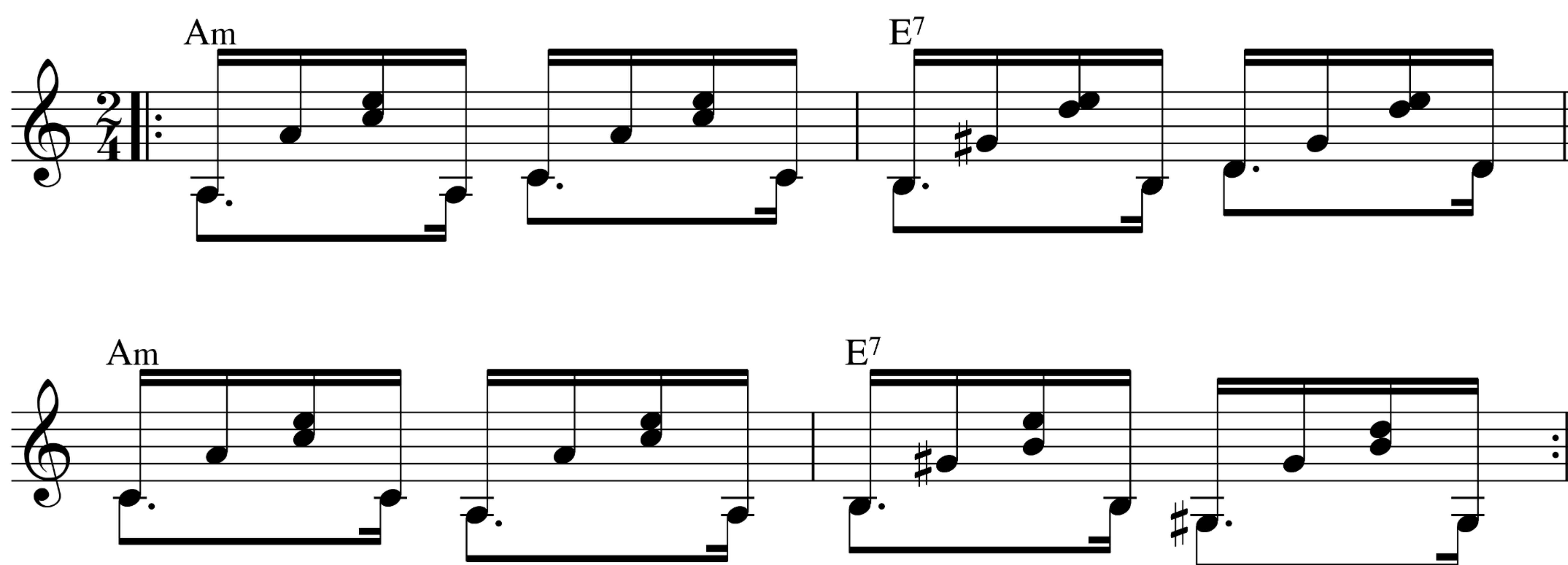
This is a moderate-tempo choro performed by Jacob do Bandolim:

There are many ways to translate this rhythmic information to the guitar levadas; below are some examples of the most common ones.

All versions should be light, as if they’re floating, with a slight accent on the second sixteenth note:

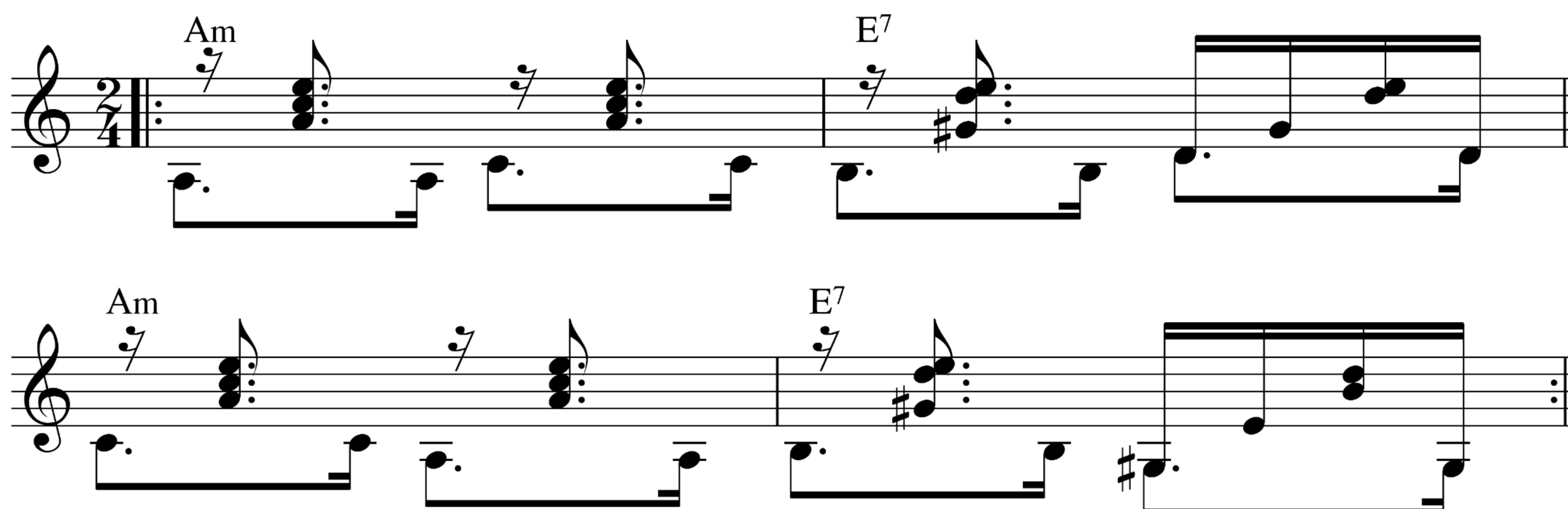
1: The first pattern has a separation between *i*, *m*, and *a* fingers:

Ex 1



2: The same as #1 but with block chords:

Ex 2



3: A variation with more subdivisions:

Ex 3
Choro-Canção

Ex 3, Choro-Canção. The notation shows a variation with more subdivisions. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each starting with a syncopated eighth note followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains four measures of music, each starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The first measure of the bottom staff has a sharp sign before the first note.

4: A more dense version with notes on every sixteenth:

Ex 4. The notation shows a more dense version with notes on every sixteenth. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each starting with a syncopated eighth note followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains four measures of music, each starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The first measure of the bottom staff has a sharp sign before the first note. The word "simile" is written above the third measure of the top staff.

5: Another common syncopation:

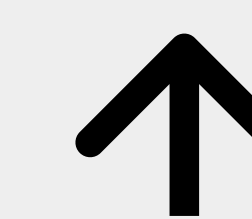
Ex 5. The notation shows another common syncopation. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each starting with a syncopated eighth note followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef and contains four measures of music, each starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The first measure of the bottom staff has a sharp sign before the first note.

Choro: Examples from the Repertoire

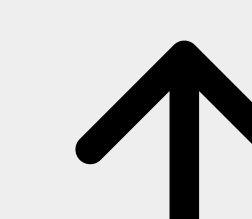
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Whenever we find a similar figuration in classical pieces, we can easily use this accent on the second sixteenth note, creating a better-informed performance.

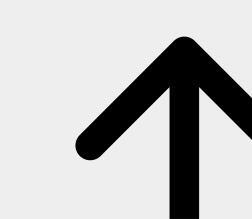
Part B of “Choro da Saudade” by Barrios

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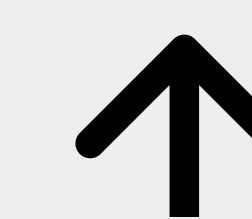
“Choros No. 1” by Villa-Lobos

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Repertoire of the great composer **Garoto** is full of examples;

[YOUTUBE](#)

listen to “Jorge do Fusa” and “Choro Triste No. 1”

[YOUTUBE](#)

Now let's practice the final chord sequence. [Play along with Lora in the video!](#)

Em B7/F# Em/G G#^o7 Am E7/B Am/C Am

D7 D7/A G/B G F#7 A#^o B7 B7/F#

Em B7/F# Em/G G#^o7 Am E7/B Am/C Am

F#^o7 Am Em/G Em F#^o7 B7 Em

Baião: Overview

[WATCH LESSON](#)

Baião is a very traditional rhythm from the northeast of Brazil, played in parties all around the country as the music for a couple's dance called "forró."

Unlike the samba and choro, which originated and have been primarily developed in the urban environment of big cities, the baião is rooted in the rural areas of northeastern Brazil. For this reason, few official documents can help us investigate the earliest appearances of the genre. Still, as with most styles within Brazilian music, their evolution spans long periods, with gradual and constant transformations.

The baião as we know it today was defined during the 1940s, with the creation of a definitive aesthetic by singer and composer **Luiz Gonzaga** and lyricist **Humberto Teixeira**. This dance and rhythm reached the whole country, especially after the recording of the song that is considered the hymn of baião, "**Asa Branca**," in 1947.

The etymological roots of its name are as controversial as the primary rhythmic sources of influences that compound the genre. However, it is unanimous among historians that the baião was formed after the encounter of binary time signature African dances, like the **lundu** and the **calango**, with native indigenous dances, such as the **cateretê** and the **cururu**:

Baião **Cateretê**

bai - ão *ca - te - re - tê*

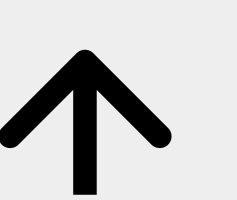
Calango **Cururu**

cal - an - go *cu - ru - ru*

These are some of the African and Native Indigenous rhythms that supposedly contributed to the formation of baião. Looking at this chart, we can easily identify the rhythmic matrix of the baião in the first beat of all these rhythms: a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth.

When researching these rhythms for a lecture, Lora discovered that the names of the rhythms often fit the subdivision of the rhythm itself. In fact, these four examples fit perfectly! Try saying the syllable over the rhythm yourself.

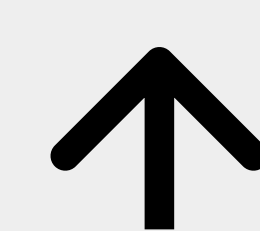
The Forró

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The traditional instrumentation for a forró party (popular gatherings where couples dance to the sound of baião, xote, arrasta-pé and forró, as it is also refers to a particular rhythm), is composed of the accordion, the zabumba, and the triangle.

“Não Levo Maria” by Trio Nordestino (1968)

Listen for the sound of this traditional instrumentation (accordion, zabumba, and triangle):

[YOUTUBE](#)

The **zabumba** is a low percussion instrument that executes the rhythmic pattern, complementing the second beat with the **bacalhau** (a thin wooden stick that is struck on the inferior part of the instrument, producing a high pitch sound).



Ex 1

Baião

+ = aberto
0 = fechado

bacaalhau

This is the general outline of the baião rhythm. The triangle complements the rhythmic matrix with sixteenth-note subdivisions accenting the offbeats in a movement of opening and closing the hands.

Note that the **first beat is short** in the bass line, and the weight lies on the last sixteenth notes that anticipate the second beat. Just as the choro is a specific rhythm within its own repertoire, so is the forró – and it is very similar to the baião, with a few differences:

Ex 2

Forró

bacaalhau

The key difference with the forró lies in the bass line: the first note of the bass is longer and heavier; the last sixteenth note of the first beat is less prominent; the bacaalhau attacks right at the second beat, followed by an extra eighth note.

Let's listen to a forró, again by the amazing Trio Nordestino, titled "Forró Pesado":

[YOUTUBE](#)

When we translate these patterns for the right hand, we can use these variations on the bass notes with the thumb and execute the constant subdivision of sixteenth notes of the triangle in a free and creative form, using arpeggios and block chords on the treble notes with the fingers *i*, *m*, and *a*.

These examples are written with the C7 chord since the Mixolydian mode (major chord with minor seventh) is characteristic of this genre:

Ex 1

Ex 2

Ex 3

Ex 4

Use your creativity to come up with your own levadas. The important thing is the bass element. **Always put your weight on that last sixteenth note of the first beat.**

Baião: Examples from the Repertoire

[WATCH LESSON](#)

When we find pieces in the solo guitar repertoire that are written as a baião, we have all the aforementioned options for articulations and accents. The division (3 + 3 + 2) is known as the tresillo and is present in the music of all Latin America, habanera and Cuban tumbao. It is probable that one will find this subdivision in a music that was not intended to be a baião or forró. For example, Brouwer's *Danza Caracteristica* is based on Cuban rhythms, but we can still apply the articulations learned here for interesting results.

We should always apply the groove when playing something clearly based on baião, such as **Roland Dyens's Saudades No. 3**. Baião influence is even present in Dyens's well-known piece "**Fuoco**" (*Libra Sonatina*) ([see tonebase lesson](#)).

Practice the following chord sequence for baião, [and follow along with Lora in the video!](#)

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords for practice in 2/4 time. The chords are: Am, Dm, G7, C, Fmaj7, Bø7, E7, Am, Am, Dm, G7, C, Fmaj7, Bø7, E7, Am. The notation includes treble clef, 2/4 time signature, and various articulations like accents and slurs.

If you have questions about the content discussed in these lessons, **Mr. Lora has made himself available** at the following email address: douglaslorabrazilianmusic@gmail.com

The most important message from this course is that **listening to original recordings** and **researching the traditional settings** of any national style is crucial to developing a consistent interpretation. It will only enrich you as a musician and bring authenticity to your playing.

Whether you are starting to learn some Brazilian rhythms to accompany a soloist or a singer, or a classical guitarist playing repertoire that features music inspired by the Brazilian culture, we hope these insights will help you achieve the true feel and groove of this music.

As guitar players, we have to learn from the masters of our instrument and absorb their styles. In music, there is always something to learn. Imitating and transcribing great players is a great way to experience that until, naturally, your own personality takes over.

Below is a list of names of guitar players, composers, groups that contributed most to these musical identities from Brazil. From there, you will discover many others on your own; this is just a starting point. Enjoy the journey!

			Guitar Players/
Samba	Choro/Maxixe	Baião/Forró	Composers
Cartola	Ernesto Nazareth	Luiz Gonzaga	João Pernambuco
Noel Rosa	Chiquinha Gonzaga	Dominguinhos	Garoto
Adoniran Barbosa	Pixinguinha	Trio Nordestino	Dilermano Reis
Nelson Cavaquinho	Jacob do Bandolim	Os Três do Nordeste	Rafael Rabello
Paulinho da Viola	Radamés Gnatalli	Ary Lobo	Dino 7 Cordas
Roberto Ribeiro	Benedito Lacerda	Anastácia	Baden Powell
João Nogueira	Época de Ouro	Edmílson do Pífano	Luiz Bonfá
João Gilberto	Regional do Canhoto	Sivuca	Valter e Valdir Silva
Chico Buarque	Os Carioquinhos no Choro	Jackson do Pandeiro	Marco Pereira
Paulo Cezar Pinheiro	Waldir Azevedo	Trio Mossoró	Paulo Bellinati

Notes

[illegible]

If you have any corrections, comments, or critiques relating to this workbook, please send them to ethan@tonebase.co. We strive to deliver the highest quality enrichment experience. Thank you!