

## **Why Drum?** by Jim Greiner

Drumming is one of humanity's universal traditions. For thousands of years people worldwide have drummed in groups to create and strengthen community bonds, rejuvenate and invigorate minds and bodies, enhance focus and clarity of purpose, acknowledge and celebrate important events and to just simply have fun together... to celebrate the joy of life!

So... what is it about drumming that makes it such a universal activity?

In all my travels, as well as in my lifelong study of past cultures, I have never found a people who did not have some form of rhythm activity as part of their lives and communities. From simple hand clapping and chanting, to complex polyrhythmic, multi-tonal drumming and percussion playing, people have used percussion instruments to create rhythms to accompany, focus and motivate all aspects of their lives.

Why? Because rhythm is an innate part of life! Rhythms, patterns and cycles are found everywhere in the natural world from the structure of atoms, to the growing of complex plant and animal forms, to the cycles of the sun and moon, the seasons and more. We humans are also relentlessly driven by the inner rhythms of our bodies and minds and interconnected by the rhythms of our family, community and professional lives.

As ancient people realized that these inner and outer rhythms were such an integral part of their lives, they learned that they could align with the rhythms of the natural world, and influence their internal and community rhythms, in profoundly positive ways by engaging in rhythm play. Using drumming to celebrate a young man's or young woman's rite of passage into adulthood, for example, focuses the individual, and the community, on the significance of the event to the young person and to the community, while providing the cathartic experience necessary to make the enormous transition into this new stage of life.

Drumming is one of life's many blessings as well as one of our most profound ways of celebrating the blessings of life!

Drumming for recreation and community building is becoming enormously popular in our modern world. In the past few decades a powerful, grassroots drumming movement has swept North America and is growing in Europe, Asia and beyond. Tens of thousands of people are drumming purely for the fun and life enhancing benefits of drumming.

We do this by learning, at the very least, where the instruments and rhythms come from, how they are used in traditional contexts and how to play the basic traditional sounds that are part of the nature of the instruments. This is not difficult! It just involves having the intention to

honor these traditional elements when we drum. In fact, this approach makes drumming a much more interesting and profound experience because we become a part of the rich traditions and history of drumming. We connect with all the people who have drummed throughout the world and throughout history!

I've found time and time again that the participants in my drumming programs, whether they are employees and managers of a corporation, members of a therapeutic group, school children or part of a community celebration always appreciate knowing something about the traditions of the instruments and the people who developed them. It gives them the sense that they are part of something greater than just the immediate, feel good experience!

Rhythms are the foundation upon which our own lives are built, as well. From the inner rhythms of our heartbeats, breathing patterns and even brain waves to the outer patterns and cycles of our personal, family, professional and community lives, rhythms are constantly present and affecting every aspect of life.

We have the innate ability to shape the rhythms of our lives so that they serve us and help us create the kinds of lives that we want to live. For example, we can create positive inner rhythms during stressful situations by taking a few deep, slow breaths in order to calm and focus our minds and bodies. We can also look at the "bad habits" and "vicious cycles" of our lives and create rhythms and patterns that help us to live the lives we WANT to live!

People in fast-paced, distraction-filled modern cultures often lose touch with this ability to understand and influence the underlying rhythms that shape our lives. Drumming satisfies our innate need and ability to get into a groove within ourselves and with others. This Groove State, as I call it, is the same relaxed, focused and intensely intuitive state that athletes call the Zone. This is the same state that psychologists refer to as Flow and that martial artists and people who meditate call Effortless Mastery. This is an innate, universal experience that is part of our nature as human beings.

The physical act of drumming also releases stress and invigorates minds and bodies, while the process of getting into a groove with others inspires us to work as a community and rewards us for the effort with richer relationships. Let's not forget that it is also just simply a whole lot of fun to make music individually and as part of a group!

Group drumming succeeds when the participants play their interdependent parts with the intention that the parts work together to create the complete rhythm. This is the same process that any group, be it a village, a corporation, a family, etc., undergoes when the group members contribute their individual skills, talents and personalities to shared values and goals.

I've seen everyone from young children, to busy parents and community members, to CEOs, managers and employees of companies of all sizes enjoy the many physical, mental and emotional benefits of drumming. Recent clinical studies have also conclusively documented the enormous physical, mental and emotional benefits of focused, intentional drumming. Our powerful intellects are recognizing what our physical and emotional selves have known for thousands of years... drumming works!

We are coming full circle in our recognition of drumming as a fun, useful tool to enhance the quality of all aspects of our modern lives. The recreational and community drumming movement is still in it's infancy; we are just getting this groove going, so to speak. I see drumming as a vehicle for bringing people together with the intention of creating rhythms and patterns that serve us in truly enhancing the quality of our lives and helping to pass on to our children the best of humanity's universal values and goals.

I'd like to emphasize that the contemporary recreational and community drumming movement owes an immense debt of gratitude to the peoples who have shared their traditional drumming styles and instruments with the world. We should always show respect for these peoples and their traditions in our approach to drumming, whether we are doing it for fun, for community building or for therapeutic benefits.