

# Rhythm-Based Fitness Programs

By John Fitzgerald and Jim Greiner

It probably comes as no surprise to hear that many people in modern societies are overweight, under active, and generally unfit. A study in the December 21, 2005 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (as reported at [www.theheart.org](http://www.theheart.org)) demonstrated that, in the words of the study's lead author, Dr. Mercedes Carnethon, "One important consequence of inactivity is poor cardio respiratory fitness." Carnethon goes on to state, "This is a serious problem that should be addressed by encouraging physical activity and making environments that are conducive to healthy, physically active lifestyles."

Of course, we percussionists already know beyond a shadow of a doubt that playing percussion is quite simply one of the most uplifting, healthy, and downright beneficial activities that human beings have ever developed throughout our long and rich history! Recently, some very innovative people from diverse backgrounds, using a wide range of approaches, have used the age-old, universally-enjoyed activity of playing percussion as the basis for creating groundbreaking, rhythm-based fitness programs. It has been our immense pleasure and honor to interview five of these people and to explore the ways in which they blend their passion for percussion, fitness, and service to humankind. Here is a brief overview of each of their programs.

## Drums Alive: Carrie Elkins

Carrie Elkins, MA, is the founder and creative director of the Drums Alive fitness and wellness program. She is the owner and education coordinator of Global Wellness, a fitness and wellness consulting company in Germany.

Created in 2001 in Germany, where Carrie resides, Drums Alive has been presented in several countries including the U.S., Japan, China, and in Europe. Carrie has developed a certification program that is available through Drums Alive and NETA (the National Exercise Trainers Association). An online course is available through Desert Southwest Fitness ([www.dswfitness.com](http://www.dswfitness.com)). The program generally follows the guidelines set forth by the American Council on Exercise.

The Drums Alive workout includes several

aspects of good health practices and emphasizes the components of wellness philosophies: physical, mental, emotional, and social. Drums Alive combines the rhythm of drums with the passion of dance. It allows for expression and creativity, as well as providing the participants with an impressive degree of fitness and, most importantly, fun!

Participants primarily use drumsticks on exer-



cise balls, although hand-held percussion such as maracas, jingle bells, tambourines, or Puili (split bamboo sticks from Hawaii) can also be incorporated.

Pre-recorded music is used for parts of the program; at other times the activity is accompanied by the rhythms generated by the participants themselves. Each Drums Alive session includes a warm-up period at the beginning, a middle portion that includes drumming tailored to specific populations (such as well children and adults, and children and adults with physi-

cal and mental challenges), a section focused on a cardiovascular workout, a wellness drumming section, and a cool-down activity.

Carrie's stated intention for the sessions is to create a "whole brain (mind), whole body" experience—to provide a platform for people in all walks of life the ability to experience the joy of movement in combination with powerful and healing rhythms.

For more information visit [www.drums-alive.com](http://www.drums-alive.com).

## Taiko Fit: Michelle Unrau

Michelle Unrau, PhD, has worked in the fitness industry since 1990 and is a trained scientist and educator. She is Executive Director of Group Exercise for FitCity for Women Clubs in Vancouver, Canada.

Michelle founded the TaikoFit program in 2002 after a friend introduced her to traditional Japanese Taiko drumming. The combination of the drummer's physical movements, energy, and the beat reminded her of her own fitness classes, and she knew that adapting the concept of Taiko drumming to aerobics would be, pun intended, "a big hit." As a master trainer for the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association and senior management for a Vancouver fitness chain, she was very familiar with the fitness standards required to design a safe and effective program.

TaikoFit workouts range from 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the class level—beginner or intermediate/advanced. Muted Taiko drums are preferred, but Gomibako (inexpensive "garbage can" Taiko) or fitness balls can be substituted if necessary. Traditional Bachii (Japanese drumsticks) are used for striking the drums.

The use of pre-recorded music is at the discretion of the instructor and the class. Culturally specific Taiko music is suggested to set the tone for each class during drum setup, and music with an Asian flavor for use during the cool-down period. The middle sections of the workout are often unaccompanied by recorded music to allow for flexibility of tempo and the execution of specific drumming patterns and energy-building drum rolls (called *oroshi*). Drumming is performed in an upright as well as reclined

position to give the core and abdominal area an additional workout. The workout concludes with stretching and a short Zen meditation.

Fun, stress release, improved neuro-motor coordination, and aerobic fitness are the intended outcomes of TaikoFit.

Concerned with the cost of training and maintaining credentials for fitness instructors and the impact on costs of fitness for all, Michelle decided to offer the nine hour for-credit training program for free to all fitness professionals and school teachers. It includes a training DVD and manual at a minimal charge to cover the production costs. There are currently about 50 certified TaikoFit trainers in the U.S. and Canada and the program is expanding.

For more information visit [www.taikofit.com](http://www.taikofit.com).

### Rhythm Gym: Kalani

Kalani's 30-year career includes numerous tours, recordings, publications, and presentations for various groups and organizations. He travels internationally as a musician, presenter, and trainer.

Rhythm Gym began in 2002 when Kalani was looking for a way to combine two of his favorite activities: making music and exercising. He felt that two health-promoting aspects were mostly absent from some fitness programs: the social and the playful. The answer was simple: combine the physical aspects of aerobic exercise with the creative and social aspects of group drumming. While attending a Taiko drumming class, Kalani noted the physical demands and believed that, in combination with the social aspects of facilitated group drumming, this could prove to be a powerful combination for physical and social wellness.

The program was first intuitively conceived through both drumming and dance practices, but later developed to meet some of the standards in both music and movement education. The goal of Rhythm Gym is to offer services and training at little or no cost to those in need.

Participants are taken through a progression of activities that include stretching, breathing, movement, vocalizing, and guided imagery. In addition, Rhythm Gym sessions incorporate body percussion, Rhythm Ball (using eight-inch playground balls for rhythmic play and drumming), and caxixis in solo, duo, and small group activities. Most activities begin with unison rhythms that are demonstrated by the trainer, and then participants are invited to improvise. The entire program is accompanied by pre-recorded music created specifically for Rhythm Gym.

Participation in Rhythm Gym sessions are intended to increase socialization, elevate mood states, enhance musical skills and creativity, and improve physical condition, coordination, and self confidence.

Currently, Rhythm Gym programs take place primarily in the Los Angeles area. Venues include recreation and parks facilities, and

elementary and middle schools. Rhythm Gym sessions have been offered at several conferences, including the Oregon State Music Educators Conference and the PACE (Physical Activity in Contemporary Education) Conference.

For more information visit [www.rhythmgym.org](http://www.rhythmgym.org).

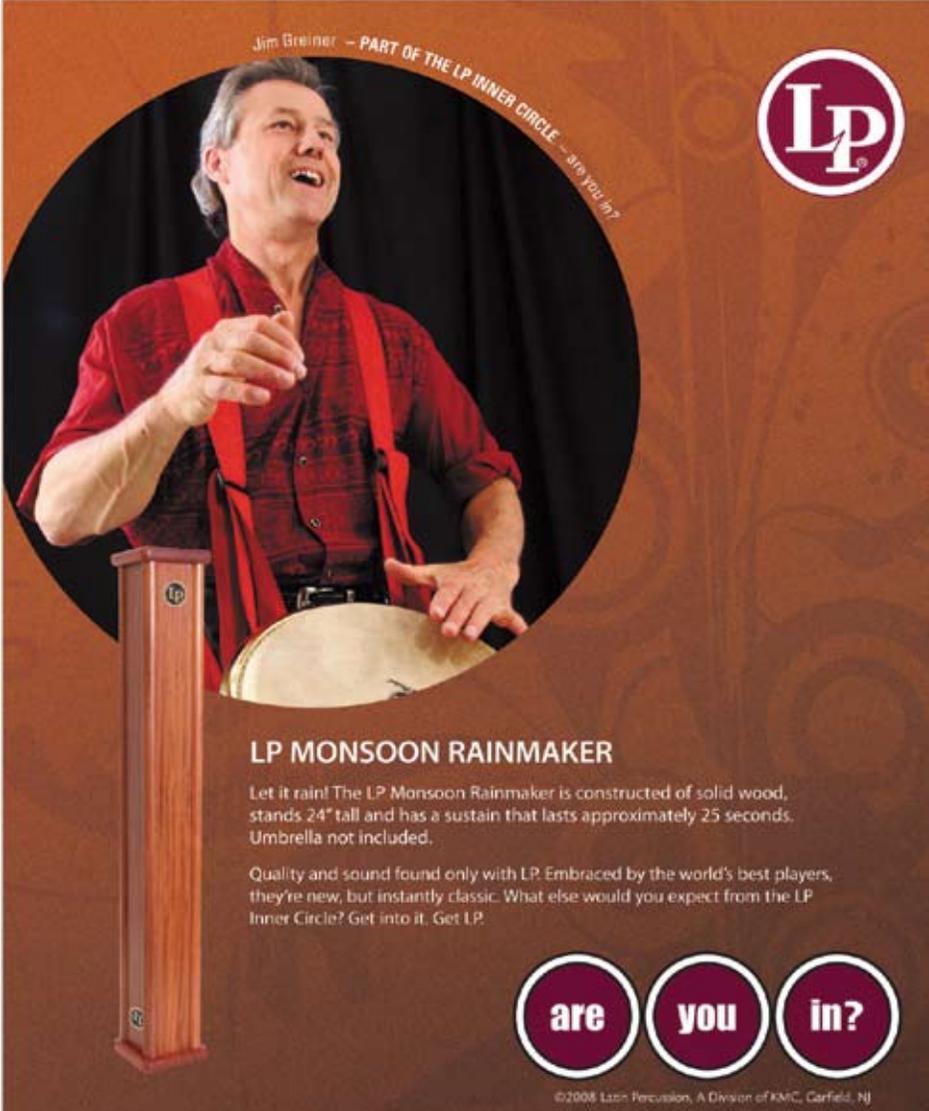
### FitRhythms: Paulo Mattioli

Paulo Mattioli has dedicated his life to building health, wellness, and community through his talents as a world percussionist, recording artist, performer, educator, author, producer, and facilitator. Paulo's involvement in sports and drumming from an early age led to the development of the FitRhythms program, which integrates both of these passions. The program concept evolved organically from Paulo's facilitation and fitness experience and was ultimately designed to meet the stringent safety and fitness requirements of ACE (American Council on Exercise). FitRhythms was also the subject of clinical research that documented favorable outcomes for participants who burned an average of nine calories per minute.

Participants reap all the psycho-social benefits of community drumming, plus physical benefits such as cardio-vascular fitness, enhanced co-ordination, joint mobility, range of motion, muscular strength, and skeletal support.

The facilitator and an original world music program CD set the correct tempo for maximum aerobic benefits from the class. Participants are in constant motion as they use hand-held percussion to create their own rhythms while interacting with one another in various combinations. The program design allows people to participate at their own pace; there are no steps, routines, or rhythms to learn. The intention is to create an inclusive atmosphere with lots of opportunities for success, personal expression, a full body workout and, of course, fun!

FitRhythms offers two-day facilitator certification training that imparts all the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully facilitate the program and includes 16 hours of continuing education credits. Over 100 FitRhythms facilitators and trainers throughout the United States, Asia, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom have been trained in the FitRhythms methodol-



Jim Breiner — PART OF THE LP INNER CIRCLE — ARE YOU IN?

**LP MONSOON RAINMAKER**

Let it rain! The LP Monsoon Rainmaker is constructed of solid wood, stands 24" tall and has a sustain that lasts approximately 25 seconds. Umbrella not included.

Quality and sound found only with LP. Embraced by the world's best players, they're new, but instantly classic. What else would you expect from the LP Inner Circle? Get into it. Get LP.

**are you in?**

©2008 Latin Percussion, A Division of K&M, Garfield, NJ

# cim

CLEVELAND  
INSTITUTE  
OF MUSIC

Joel Smirnoff, President



Roger Mastroranni

*“Close ties with The Cleveland Orchestra, a stimulating, supportive and friendly atmosphere, together with outstanding practice and performance opportunities create an ideal environment at CIM for aspiring professional musicians. CIM students are exposed to all facets of timpani and percussion as well as a complete orchestral repertoire, and they traditionally find rewarding placement in the highly competitive musical field.”*

*Richard Weiner, Principal Percussionist,  
The Cleveland Orchestra*

The percussion faculty at the Cleveland Institute of Music includes Paul Yancich and Richard Weiner, both members of The Cleveland Orchestra.

Bachelor of Music, Master of Music, Doctor of Musical Arts, Artist Certificate, Artist Diploma and Professional Studies  
William Fay, Director of Admission, 11021 East Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44106 or at 216-795-3107

[cim.edu](http://cim.edu)



ogy. Sessions are being conducted both in the U.S. and overseas at fitness centers, hospitals, clinics, schools, youth centers, recreation centers, and senior centers.

For more information visit [www.fitrhythms.com](http://www.fitrhythms.com).

### Boom! Total Rhythm: Robert Wallace

Robert Wallace lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and is a trained percussionist and dancer. He has performed with Bonnie Riatt, Joan Baez, Mickey Hart, Airto Moreira, Margareth Menzes, the Starlift Steel Orchestra, Mike Marshall, Jovinos Santos Neto, and David Rudder. Robert's background in African and Afro-Caribbean drum and dance, his love of sports and fitness, and a clear commitment to getting participants in touch with their inner rhythm, have given him the tools and inspiration to create Total Rhythm. The classes complement other fitness routines: lifting, cycling, swimming, yoga, aerobics—all of which, as Robert notes, are based implicitly on rhythm.

Total Rhythm offers beginning, advanced, and expert level classes lasting 60 minutes. Beginning sessions are designed so that first-time attendees can easily participate and get the full benefit of the class. The program uses tall-standing Total Rhythm hand drums, and involves combinations of dance and fitness moves, stretching, chanting, and clapping. There is no pre-recorded music track; Robert facilitates the session as all participants play the same rhythms and move to the same choreography.

The sessions begin with clapping rhythms and cardio warm-up, move on to full-body stretching without drums, then on to the Total Rhythm workout sequence with drums, and finally close with a cool-down session, also with drums.

Total Rhythm classes are intended to release stress, increase flexibility and balance, give a great mid-impact aerobic workout, increase core strength, help with weight loss, enhance community harmony, and increase self-esteem. Currently the Total Rhythms program is available in the San Francisco/East Bay Area and all sessions are facilitated by Robert.

For more information visit <http://totalrhythm.com>.

### CONCLUSION

As you can see, each contributor—Carrie, Michelle, Kalani, Paulo, and Robert—has developed a unique program, and each of them has demonstrated enormous creative spirit. Their work is a testament to the immense inspirational power of following one's passion in life.

In addition to all of the enormously enlightening information we've learned about the fitness benefits of these programs, we've also noted that they focus on "emotional wellness" in one aspect or another. This benefit is a result of the connection with other participants and their connection to that all-important unifying factor, rhythm. After all, what's the point of being physically fit if you don't also have a sense of well-being?

As percussionists, there are vocational opportunities available to us that were not even imagined a generation ago. From blending instruments from different cultures, to facilitating interactive programs for diverse populations, to rhythm-based fitness activities, our passion for percussion can lead us in directions that are limited only by our ability to imagine new possibilities. And that ability is, by definition, limitless—and drumming is good for us!

But you already knew that!

**John Fitzgerald** is the Manager of Recreational Music Activities for Remo Inc. and a freelance percussionist in Los Angeles. He is also a member of the PAS Recreational Drumming Committee and is a trained Drum Circle Facilitator. His duties at Remo include managing Recreational Drumming products and programs. John had facilitated in the U.S. and abroad, as well as regularly at Remo's Recreational Music Making Center in North Hollywood, California. He continues to freelance in L.A. in live performances and on many major motion picture film scores including *Spiderman 2*, *Runaway Jury*, and *Swordfish*.

**Jim Greiner** is a member of the PAS Recreational Drumming Committee and the Health and Wellness Committee (sub-chair for hand drumming). Jim is also head of LP's Recreational and Community Drumming Program. Jim's duties with LP include conducting clinics and workshops, making instructional videos, authoring articles, community outreach, and instrument-design consultation. Through his company, Jim Greiner's Hands-On! Drumming Events ([www.handsondrum.com](http://www.handsondrum.com)) he conducts rhythm-based programs and percussion workshops for corporate, community, school, and private groups worldwide. He is also the percussionist with the 10-piece corporate special-events band The Bill Hopkins Rockin' Orchestra. **PN**

