

Jim Greiner

World Clinic/Performance

Thursday, 2:00 p.m.

Fisk Room

Drum Circle Facilitation

Training Workshop

Sunday, Noon – 5:00 p.m.

Facilitating drum circles, or Rhythm-Based Activities (a term I use to include a wider range of practices), is quickly emerging as a career path—or at least a part-time avocation—for a wide range of percussion aficionados. Rhythm-Based Activities are also becoming an enormously useful tool for non-percussionists who work with groups of all types. These include teachers (music and non-music), therapists, activities directors, team leaders, and many others.

Let's start by defining the commonly used term "drum circle." There seem to be almost as many definitions of "drum circle" as there are participants. I view drum circles as being basically drumming and rhythm-based jam sessions. Some are based upon drumming traditions from around the world; some are spontaneous, free-form events; some are led by lead drummers and some are facilitated by one or more people.

Drum circles are part of a grassroots movement that developed over the past few decades from a wide range of people who want to play music and engage in healthy, community-building recreational activities. They are rooted in the concept, found in many cultures, that the average person can have fun making music even if he or she is not a professional musician. Drumming is being used for a wide range of reasons today including recreation, stress reduction, energizing, team and community building, physical and mental therapy, and celebrating.

Drum circles are usually not intended to be classes in technique or to adhere to specific traditions, although many people whose first drumming experience is in a drum circle will eventually begin studying one or more forms of traditional drumming. However, I strongly believe that drum circle

PASIC 2004 Drum Circle Facilitation Training Workshop

BY JIM GREINER

facilitation, like any musical path (and like most of life) is rooted in fundamentals. In my workshop I will cover these fundamentals for beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of drum circle facilitation.

These fundamentals are intertwined and interdependent, much like the patterns we use in group drumming, and overlap in ways that support our facilitation activities. My approach to facilitating drum circles is based upon five fundamental concepts: Technique, Grooving, Collaborating, Progressing, and Celebrating.

Technique includes both drumming techniques and the techniques involved with facilitating rhythm-based activities. Technical prowess is not a major factor in many drum circles; however, a certain amount of drumming technique is important in order to get clear, consistent sounds out of each instrument, to not hurt our hands (in the case of hand drumming), and to play patterns that are articulate and consistent. It is important to encourage the highest level of musicality possible, even among novice and non-professional musicians, in a non-judgmental manner.

Technique also includes listening to each other so that our patterns intertwine to create a unified rhythm. This aspect of technique also enhances the community-building powers of group drumming. Finally, learning at least some techniques, and the traditions behind them, shows respect for the people who have developed the instruments.

The techniques involved with the facilitation process itself vary for different kinds of populations and their needs, abilities, and goals. For example, drumming with elderly people requires different approaches than drumming with a corporate client. However, there are some fundamental techniques involved in facilitating all rhythm-based activities that I will cover in the workshop. These include: the physical arrangement of the drums and the environment, verbal and non verbal cues and when to use them, the different types of instruments and their roles, getting the drumming started, when to facilitate and when to let the group just play, various rhythm exercises and games, using voice and movement, effectively working the group's themes and goals into the activity, and closing the program so that the participants get the most out of the experience.

Grooving means creating a musical flow that results in the regular, repetitive pulsation of beats in consistent time. The experience of grooving is one of the fundamental elements of drum circles that moves people so profoundly and makes them want to drum more.

Collaborating refers to a willingness to play one's part in the spirit of contributing to shared goals. The goals may vary for different types of drum circles, but some common themes are to create a percussion experience that meets the needs of the



PASIC 2003 Drum Circle Facilitation Workshop

PHOTO BY BOB DEBARTINA



participants, to help them get the most out of the experience, and to create a spirit of community. Each group is different, and it is our role as facilitators to use our skills to serve the group.

Progressing means helping the group to go deeper into the drumming over time and to get the most out of it. An effective facilitator has his or her finger on the pulse of the group, so to speak, and recognizes when it is ready for a change and what kind of changes will best serve the group. These include helping the group to help itself get through rough spots, volume and tempo changes, simplifying or adding variations to the patterns, helping individuals get back into the rhythm if they get off, and knowing when to use rhythm exercises and games.

Celebrating means just having fun! This is one of the single most important end results of a drum circle. Having fun means that all of the other fundamentals and goals will be reinforced and that the participants will want to repeat the experience. Drumming is one of life's blessings and is one of our best ways to celebrate the blessing that is life!

The Drum Circle Facilitation Training Workshop will, of course, be hands-on. That is, we will play together and there will be an opportunity, for all those who wish, to practice the facilitation techniques covered. I'd like to express my appreciation to PAS for inviting me to give this workshop, for recognizing the drum circle as an important part of the worldwide drumming community, and for contributing to the work to train drum circle facilitators. I look forward to doing this workshop with those of you who would

RICH HOLLY - ASSOCIATE DEAN,
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like to begin, or continue, your drum circle facilitation studies, and to another great PASIC. See you in Nashville!

Jim Greiner is an internationally renowned percussionist, educator, and community drumming leader who has presented at several PASICs. Since 1980 he has led interactive drumming programs, clinics, and rhythm-based keynote presentations for corporations, communities, schools, therapeutic centers, and private groups throughout North America and beyond through his company, Hands-On! Drumming (www.handsondrum.com).

Jim's DVD, *Community Drumming For Health & Happiness*, is available through Latin Percussion Inc. and Warner Bros. Publications. **PN**

Drum Circles
CC Room 103, 9:00 p.m.
Jim Greiner Thursday
John Yost Friday
Matt Savage Saturday