

# An Introduction to Drum Circle Music

BY KALANI

As the group drumming movement continues to grow, more people are turning toward qualified facilitators to help them create special musical events in a variety of settings. Many of these events take the form of a drum circle.

## WHAT IS A DRUM CIRCLE?

A drum circle is a musical gathering. But a drum circle is more than just a circle of instruments and the act of drumming; it is also the shared experience of the participants. The drums and drumming are the vehicles that take the group to its final destination—a place where everyone has a voice and is empowered to use it, and where the creative spirit is shared by everyone in the circle. A drum circle is really a *people circle*.

A drum circle is not:

- a drum class where there is a “teacher” and “students”;
- a drumming ensemble that “practices” and “performs” for others;
- a way to “tune out” the world, but more of a way to “tune in” to your community and creative spirit.

## WHAT DOES A FACILITATOR DO?

A drum circle has the *potential* to accomplish many things, but it won't necessarily produce specific results without an experienced *facilitator*. A facilitator is not only a musician and teacher who carries the group through a process of *inclusion, cooperation* and *appreciation*, but is also a caring and compassionate guide with the training and experience to help the group reach its goals.

The role of the facilitator is to:

- provide an atmosphere that helps people feel welcome;
- help participants play music together;
- present activities that are fun and accessible;
- encourage creativity and cooperation;
- foster a sense of appreciation.

When I first started to facilitate group music making in the early 1990s, there wasn't a lot of information available on the subject. The drum circle was still emerging as a commonly accepted form of recreation and development, still shaking off the stigmatic dust of primal gatherings of sweaty men pounding out their anger around a blazing fire. I was still doing a lot of touring and recording, but there was something about the in-the-moment nature of music facilitation that



intrigued me. When I work with groups of people in “real time,” I feel connected to them in a meaningful way. I love the communication, spontaneity, and creativity that happens when a group of people who have never played together before pick up a bunch of instruments and go for it.

My interest in music facilitation grew

largely out of my role as a teacher and clinician. As the primary percussion clinician for Toca Percussion, I have traveled around the U.S., visiting music stores and turning people on to hand percussion. As my format evolved from a clinic (lecture style) to more of a jam session (circle style), I noticed that when people had the opportunity to hold and play the instruments, even though they had no experience, their excitement and enthusiasm level shot up ten-fold. People were having a great time making up their own music (with a little help from me).

The more experienced I became at music facilitation, the more questions I had: Why did some events *feel* better than others? Are there universal principles that work for every population? What are the best ways to address problems that come up? What structural elements need to be present? What is the best way to provide participants with guidance without restricting them? How do I help the experience carry over into people's lives?

Though I had many of my own “facilitator's” questions, there were many other “beginner's” questions coming from teachers, therapists, musicians, and people interested in music facilitation: Can I facilitate even though I'm not a drummer? What instruments should I use? How should I set up my drum circle? Are there specific beats that people play? How long should a drum circle be? What should I do for a children's drum circle? Can anyone do this?

It seemed that many people were interested in creating music-making opportunities for others, but didn't know where to start. I added their questions to mine and over the next few years started to develop the Drum Circle Music approach. Many of the answers to my questions came through creating activities and games for the hundreds of sessions I presented in the schools, working with multi-generational populations in music

stores all over the United States, and creating training materials for the many sessions I presented at conferences for music educators.

Beginning with PASIC 2003 in Louisville, PAS has offered a drum circle facilitator's workshop on the Sunday after PASIC. This year, I will be leading the workshop using the concepts I have developed and outlined in my book, "Together In Rhythm—A Facilitator's Guide to Drum Circle Music." It's a holistic approach to empowering groups of all kinds with ways to reach their full creative potential through *inclusion, cooperation and appreciation*. Whether you're a professional who wishes to incorporate drumming into your existing programs or intend to create a business centered around music fa-



ilitation, the principles, techniques, activities and philosophies I will share at the workshop will help you reach your goals.

**WHO CAN BECOME A DRUM CIRCLE FACILITATOR?**

Drum circle facilitation is about much more than inspiring others to take up drumming or even make music together. It's about inspiring a healthy lifestyle that includes self-expression, creativity, and community. One of the first steps we can take toward creating a musically accessible society is to place the emphasis back on *play* rather than performance and focus on the *personal benefits* rather than the musical product. If you are interested in creating a safe and supportive environment for people to explore a variety of developmental processes using movement, rhyth-

mic speech, drumming, and other modalities—and you are willing to dedicate your time and resources to gaining and developing the necessary knowledge and skills—Drum Circle Music (DCM) Training will provide you with everything you need to reach your goals.

**WHAT DO PEOPLE LEARN DURING DCM TRAINING?**

The Drum Circle Music approach is about much more than drumming. It's a way to integrate movement, drumming, chant/singing, sharing, and other activities into a holistic experience of creativity, community, and healthy expression. Facilitation skills include learning how to effectively cue a group using a variety of methods. Some of the essential non-verbal cues include starting and stopping the music, creating changes in dynamics and tempo, and focusing attention on certain aspects of the music.

DCM students learn how to help participants create music using several modes of play that may be applied across

***Excellence in Contemporary and World Percussion***

Study with noted composer, author, and percussionist  
**B. Michael Williams, Ph.D., Professor of Percussion**



Winthrop University Percussion Ensemble  
***First Construction***  
Available from Steve Weiss Music and  
Winthrop University Department of Music



Michael Spiro • Michael Williams  
***BataMbira***  
Available from Steve Weiss Music and  
[www.cdbaby.com/spirowilliams](http://www.cdbaby.com/spirowilliams)

Winthrop University Department of Music • Dr. Donald Rogers, Chair • 129 Conservatory of Music • Rock Hill, SC 29733 • 803 323-2255 • [rogersd@winthrop.edu](mailto:rogersd@winthrop.edu)



*Live/Learn/Lead*



# MORE THAN MUSIC

THE BOSTON  
CONSERVATORY  
music dance theater



## PERCUSSION/MARIMBA FACULTY

SAL RABBIO, TIMPANI  
NANCY ZELTSMAN, MARIMBA  
PATRICK HOLLENBECK, CHAIR

application deadline: dec 1



8 the fenway, boston, massachusetts 02215 | admissions.audition.info: 617.912.9153 | www.bostonconservatory.edu



will be introduced to the basic technology of drum circle facilitation over a five-hour period (noon–5 p.m.). Students will gain an overview of the Drum Circle Music level I curriculum and have an opportunity to develop facilitation skills during a community-style drum circle.

What to bring:

- Notepad and pen
- Tape recorder (no video please)

- Comfortable clothes
- Bottle of water

How to prepare:

- Read the first seven chapters of my book *To-*

*gether in Rhythm*;

- Watch the *Together in Rhythm* DVD (Activities, Games and Instrument Guide);

- Attend the Drum Circle Lab Friday at 12:00 p.m., Room C123;

- Attend the drum circles that will be held each evening during PASIC.

multiple levels of ability, thereby empowering everyone in their circle to fully participate in ways that are right for them and creating a greater sense of inclusion and community.

Workshop participants will learn how to hold and play a variety of instruments that are commonly used in community group drumming events. Instruments from the four main timbre groups (drums, woods, shakers, bells) will be identified and demonstrated. Facilitation students will learn how to group instruments by timbre, playing technique, and other traits for the purposes of creating more musical options for their participants.

Students will learn how to create an event from start to finish. Topics include: setting the physical circle (the room/space, chairs, tables, signs, etc.), the circle of music (rhythms, activities, games, etc.), and the circle of spirit (creating personal connections and learning/growing/healing from the time spent together in rhythm).

Workshop students will also learn how to avoid common mistakes and pitfalls that could result from issues of ego, performance, control, and lack of attention. Facilitation is not only about doing, it's also about *not* doing. By examining ways we might become a drum circle *debilitator*, we gain insights into our own process and become more effective.

#### ABOUT THE PAS TRAINING DAY

Participants in the PASIC Drum Circle Music Facilitator Training day

**Kalani** lectures and presents Drum Circle Music and World Rhythms! sessions and training programs throughout the U.S. and abroad at music conferences and retreat centers. Kalani is a certified Orff-Schulwerk specialist with programs that address music education, health and fitness, spirituality, and professional development. As a percussionist, he has worked with such artists as Yanni, Barry Manilow, John Mayall, Dr. John, Kenny Loggins, and Max Roach. He is the author of *Together in Rhythm – A Facilitator's Guide to Drum Circle Music*, *The Amazing Jamnasium – A Playful Companion to Together in Rhythm*, *All About Congas*, *All About Bongos*, and *All About Jembe* (all published by Alfred Music) and several instructional DVDs. Kalani is chair of the PAS Recreational Drumming Committee. PN



#### PERCUSSION INTELLIGENCE!

28 instruments mounted and played the easy way. The unique Kolberg combination stand system saves space, weight and money – no compromise!

[www.kolberg-percussion.com](http://www.kolberg-percussion.com)

direct supply worldwide