

# INTRODUCTION TO THE ART OF DRUM CIRCLE FACILITATION, PART 1

BY ARTHUR HULL

When they first began, drum circles were the exclusive realm of freeform recreational drummers and culturally specific drummers. Like oil and water, these seemingly opposite rhythm cultures did not mix. Back then, the freeform recreational drummers saw the culturally specific drummers like a wild horse sees a corral. And the culturally specific drummers saw the recreational drummers as “hippy thunder drummers” who were ignorant and disrespectful of the rhythmacultures that were the universal source of culturally specific rhythm expression.

I know this, because back in the “Summer of Love” (1967) in San Francisco I was both. I was a young man who was jamming with the freeform recreational drummers on Hippy Hill near the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, and I was also studying with the Afro-Cuban street drummers downtown, whose heroes were Mongo Santamaria and Armando Peraza.

I’m describing two sides of the same coin that I have now been straddling for over 50 years. On my life’s rhythm journey, I not only discovered that the essence in one of those rhythm cultures was the seed in the other, but that each rhythmaculture had something that the other sorely needed. From one was the ability to explore and express rhythmical improvisation, and from the other was the understanding of basic fundamentals of music making.

More importantly, as I poked my head up out of my own self-absorbed, passionately lived rhythmical life, I discovered that drummers were only a very small part of a large demographic called musicians, and the musicians were a very much smaller part of a much larger demographic called humanity.

The rest of humanity never thought of themselves of being rhythmical or musical, because they forgot about the time when they were innocently and fearlessly exploring and expressing their natural rhythmical sensibilities through movement and song. They were toddlers who were forced to grow up and become A-Dults and forgot about their innocent exploration and expression of their rhythmical bliss.

A typical joke that reflects what some people think: A child says to his mother, “Mom I want to be a drummer when I grow up.” The mother responds, “Honey, you can’t do both.”

That realization set me on the path of becoming the Rhythmical Evangelist that I am today. My challenge was to bring together the best elements of freeform drumming and cultur-

ally specific drumming in such a way that I could create a safe and accessible rhythm expression experience for the general public.

How could I, without turning it into a drum class, help ordinary non-drummers Uncover, Discover, and Recover the fearless rhythmical spirit that they all naturally expressed as a children? The answer was a Facilitated Drum Circle.

In a facilitated drum circle, I would create an environment where I could guide a group of ordinary adults and kids towards a safe, non-judgmental place where they could express and explore their rhythmical spirit in a family-friendly environment. Family-friendly drum circles are a wonderful way to bring community together, no matter what age, background,



or rhythmical experience the players possess. Drum circles are a safe place for people of any age to explore and express their rhythmical spirit. They are also a great tool for creating connections within a group, by building a sense of community and common purpose.

Drum circles are also good for the individuals within the group, by helping them connect with their own unique gifts, both musical and non-musical.

Hello, my name is Arthur Hull of Village Music Circles (VMC). It has taken me 50 years of trial and error to figure it out, but after a thousand and one mistakes—which I have turned into learning moments—I finally have worked out a simple four-step drum circle facilitation protocol that guarantees success for both facilitator and playing participants. Using this protocol in a drum circle event will help you guide a group of people of mixed ages and rhythmical expertise to a very high level of spirited rhythmical exploration and expression.

This is the first in a series of five articles and video installments that describe and demonstrate the four stages of the Village Music Circles Drum Circle Facilitation Protocol. By using this VMC protocol, you will be able to take a circle of drummers from a group-playing consciousness, to an ensemble-playing consciousness, and finally into orchestration-al consciousness, where drum rhythm grooves are turned into music.

In these articles and videos, I will show you some of the basic techniques that you can use to help people play together in a drum circle, while making the best possible rhythm music that they can create. Using and following tried and true four-step Village Music Circles' protocol can help you facilitate a fun exciting and expressive musical event for the players and for yourself.

In the last 20 years, I have taught over 10,000 people in 25 countries how to facilitate rhythm-based events and drum circles. They were not all drummers and musicians. They were school teachers, music therapists, kids at risk counselors, special needs professionals, corporate trainers, and the list goes on, until you realize that rhythm-based events serve many specific populations that span rhythm-care-giving from prenatal to hospice. You'll find drum circle facilitation being used for everything from helping folks with special needs, to corporate team-building, school assemblies, celebrating birthdays, weddings, and so much more.

The video will give you the basic foundation for facilitating a mixed population community drum circle, and it can be adapted to meet the needs of almost any rhythm-based event.

The definition of the word facilitate is "to make easy." It's that simple. As a rhythm-event facilitator, you are there to help make it easy for the players to connect their rhythm contributions into rhythmical spirit sharing and make great "drum jazz" together.

In this first video installment we will explore:

- The logistics of how to set up the physical drum circle for a successful event.
- The seven elements of the beginning Drum Call.

- Basic body language signals and facilitation techniques.
- The three reasons for going into the circle.
- The concept of GOOW.

This video features footage from drum circles at the Seattle World Rhythm Festival, MacWorld, and NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) conventions, and the VMC Playshop trainings in Barcelona, Spain and Perth, Australia.

To see the video in full, visit <https://villagemusiccircles.com/the-art-of-drum-circle-facilitation/>.

▶ Tap to play Video



*Video 1: Introduction, Setting up a Drum Circle, The 7 Elements of Drum Call*

Until the next installment in this series, Share Your Spirit!

**Arthur Hull** travels the world inspiring community-building through the metaphor of music. His pioneering rhythm facilitation work has touched the lives of thousands of people world-wide, instigating the new and growing profession of the community drum circle facilitator. In 1980 Arthur founded Village Music Circles to bring rhythm-based experiences to communities and organizations worldwide. Arthur has inspired a grass-roots movement of people from diverse cultures and backgrounds who have learned to use the impact of rhythm to improve human interaction—from corporate executives to kids at risk. **RIS**