

# PRIMAL PULSE

## The Unifying Power

THE LAST  
THING I WANTED TO  
HEAR WAS ANOTHER DRUM.

It had been a long day at PASIC '88 in San Antonio, and as stimulating as all of the clinics and concerts had been, by late in the afternoon I was experiencing percussive overload. Part of the problem was that I had spent quite a bit of time in the exhibit hall, where people were trying out instruments with wild abandon. My ears and nerves were shot by the resulting cacophony, and I just wanted to go up to my hotel room and cool out for a while before the evening's activities.

As I left the exhibit area, I passed by one of the concert/clinic halls in which a hand drumming session led by John Wyre had started just a few minutes earlier. I decided to go in for just a couple of minutes to check it out before heading for my room. On stage were Wyre (with a Turkish darabucca), John Bergamo (with a Remo frame drum), Glen Velez (with an Irish bodhran), Trichy Sankaran (with a South Indian mrdangam), Jamey Haddad (with a Hadgini drum) and Abraham Adzenyah (with an African talking drum).

There was something very calming about the rhythms they played. The musicians' technique was obvious in the variety of sounds they were able to produce on such seemingly limited instruments, but none of them were engaging in mere chops displays. The attitude was not so much that of a formal concert as of a group of friends trading stories and experiences.

By  
Rick  
Mattingly



# of Hand Drumming

They could just as easily have been sitting around a campfire as performing on stage for an audience.

After they finished playing, some forty-five minutes later, I came out feeling both relaxed and energized—something I wouldn't have thought that drumming could have done for me at that point.

"Several people told me they had a similar reaction," Wyre says. "Possibly the simplicity involved resulted in a relaxing kind of experience. I think the whole idea of music as a relaxing force or as therapy can come from the ability musicians have to lose ourselves in the process of making music. It's at a simpler level with hand drums, and I don't mean that in any sort of disparaging way at all. When one is absorbed in a simple process, one can be transported to an open, clear mind—which is the goal of any meditator or anyone seeking a little relief from the tyranny of thought.

"Glen Velez once told me that the greatest thing he ever did was put his mallets away. The door to simplicity is enticing after years of multi-percussion, timpani and drumset. You can expand all of those things into such complexity that you never run out of choices. The process of simplification allows us to write better, think more clearly and communicate in a stronger way.

"But it's also possible that you found the performance relaxing because the pieces had a certain joie de vivre about them, simply because we enjoyed playing together."

**H**and drumming is both an ancient tradition and the latest craze. More and more, people are enjoying playing percussion instruments together in “drum circles” that are popping up all across the country and involving people from all walks of life.

Executives use drum circles for team building. Drumming helps relieve the anxiety felt by Alzheimer’s disease patients as well as by former drug and alcohol abusers in recovery homes. Men’s and women’s groups drum to get in touch with their primal instincts; so do cults who meet under a full moon to play drums and dance around a fire. Senior citizens play drums for recreation and fellowship—as do people in the parking lot outside a Grateful Dead concert.

Everybody plays drums because it’s fun.

In a typical drum circle you might find West African djembes, Cuban congas and bongos, Moroccan bendirs, North African tars, Native American ceremonial drums, Brazilian surdos, Rhythm-Tech tambourines and a variety of talking drums, frame drums, cowbells and shakers.

You won’t find an American trap set.

Rhythms are seldom culturally specific. Someone might start off with a pulse, and as players join in with their own interpretations and variations, ethnic designations become meaningless. All that matters is intensity and groove.

Most participants are not counting.

Some players produce complex patterns with power and authority. Others stay simple, striking their drums as though they’re afraid they will break. Some sway to the pulse, eyes closed in rhythmic bliss, arms and hands making liquid movements as they pull sounds from their instruments. Others stand stock still, eyebrows knitted in concentration as hands and drums collide. Some look like ’60s flower children; others appear to have emerged from a Land’s End catalog.

Sometimes there are more women than men.

A strong sense of primitive power pervades as the beats and rhythms intermingle. The “song” may last for only a few minutes, crescendoing to a rapid, orgasmic climax. Or it might go on for hours, serving as a rhythmic mantra to produce trance-like states of consciousness.

Participants rarely identify themselves as “musicians” by trade.

“Anyone can grab a hand drum or a cowbell or a shaker and be part of the community,” says drumset virtuoso Terry Bozzio. “In modern music there is definitely a barrier between audience and performer. With hand drumming, someone goes to the park and starts to play and anyone can join in. A circle can always expand and there’s room for everybody, as opposed to a ladder where there is somebody on the rungs above and below you, and the only way you’re going to get ahead is to knock the guy above you off or hope he falls. That’s more what the world of professional music is like.”

Many who have become involved with hand drums over the past few years are doing it outside the typical music-industry milieu. They don’t take lessons or major in music at a university, they don’t play in bands, they’re not interested in landing a record deal, they don’t even buy their drums in traditional music stores. Sometimes, practitioners are not drumming for the sake of music making, but rather using drums as a means of reaching some other goal. In some cases, they don’t know ahead of time that they are even going to be playing drums.

“When corporations hire me for management-training programs, they don’t tell the people that they will be drumming,” says Arthur Hull, who has facilitated drum circles for numerous community groups, corporations and schools. “All they see on the schedule is: Arthur Hull, University of California at Santa Cruz, Team Building Experience. When they walk in and see the drums, a lot of them fold their arms across their chests and start backing up. You can read by their body language that they are thinking, ‘I must be in the wrong room.’”

One of Hull’s first tasks is to get everyone to relax. He says that some are concerned about looking foolish in front of their co-workers or managers. Others may be intimidated by the belief that one must have years of training to play an instrument. Even with some of the people who have had prior musical training, he must reassure those whose childhood music teachers instilled in them a fear of playing a wrong note.

Of course, there are always some who can’t wait to get at those drums.

“I ask how many musicians are here—drummers, horn players, guitarists, pianists,” Hull says. “Several people will raise their hands. Then I ask, ‘Okay, how many rhythm dorks?’ I demonstrate someone who can’t tap his foot and clap his hands in time; everybody laughs and a lot of hands go up. Then I say, ‘Okay, you musicians are in trouble because you’ve been taught to play with a metronome inside your heads. But the pulse of a drum circle will be organic and change all the time.’”

“The musicians could end up playing their parts perfectly, but if they’re not listening to the group, they will end up doing it perfectly wrong. The rhythm



Ray Dillard (center) acts as drum circle facilitator at PASIC '93 in Columbus, Ohio.

dorks, on the other hand, are concentrating on what the group is doing and how they can fit in. They get to the point where they understand that it's not about musical expertise, because that's certainly outside their lifestyle. It's about relationships. They see that it's okay to make mistakes, to experiment, to take some risks rhythmically and find out where they fit in. Then they begin to wholly participate in the experience.

"Musical understanding is not necessarily an advantage in a drum circle. It's a matter of wanting to make the circle work and becoming part of a larger whole."

That philosophy of merging into a group identity has made drum circles popular in the corporate world. "We needed to bring three different organizations together: people from Apple Computer research, people from a school district and people from a university," said Kim Rose, Project Specialist with Apple. "Drumming together and creating a sort of 'village of drummers,' if you will, made us feel that we were not three separate entities but one group working on a common goal.

"Another goal was just to have some pure fun making music. Music has always been a very important part of our company's thinking, and there is a lot in common between music and computer programming. Arthur has a wonderful way of helping people deal with difficult rhythms. He sets up a safe environment in which you don't feel like you can't do it, and so you're ready to bang away. I think the most intense feeling I ever had was at the end of the first group drumming experience I ever participated in. Everyone in the room was drumming together and really going at it, and the whole place was resounding with these rhythms. It felt really liberating."

A group of actors from Stage One: The Louisville Children's Theatre found that drumming enhanced their sense of teamwork when they had three weeks to learn drum parts for a production of *Ananse: the African Spiderman*, which opened the company's '94-95 season. "For three

of us, this was the first Stage

One production we had been

in, whereas some of the others had been with Stage One for years," said L.Roi Hawkins. "But with the drumming, we were all starting from ground zero, so I think it helped us get in tune with each other."

"Right," said Jodi Baker, who says she fell in love with playing the shekere as a result of the experience. "Because all of us were in the same boat, the struggle to learn our drum parts brought about a real camaraderie that we wouldn't have gotten just from going out for drinks together after the rehearsals."

"As a company that works together over several shows, eventually we all become attuned to each other to the Nth degree," said Art Burns, a veteran member of the company. "But the drumming helped that process happen faster. Also, in the eight years I've been with Stage One, that production was the first time I've ever seen the children in the audience get involved with a play to such a degree that they were bouncing around to the rhythm. The drums brought them into it more than any show I've ever been in."

"I loved watching the children in the audience just grooving to the sound—itty-bitty kids who couldn't stop moving," said actor Tony Policci. "We were creating something with rhythm that went beyond the spoken word, and the energy we were giving to the children and to each other was wonderful."

Cut to the movie *9 to 5*—the scene where "boss" Dabney Coleman is telling underlings Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda, "You girls, of course, never got to play football and baseball, which is a shame, because that's where you really learn about teamwork."

"It does take teamwork to play sports," Hull agrees. "But there is an aggressiveness to it and an 'us/them' consciousness. Companies in our society are competing with everyone else rather than doing the Japanese thing, where two or three companies work together to develop things that no one of them has the technology, time or energy to do by themselves."

Prudential California Realty had its agents partici-

pate in a drum circle to diffuse some of the negative aspects of competition. "There has always been a rivalry between Northern California and Southern California agents," explains Pat Catlin, Broker of Record at Prudential. "To a point that's good, but communication is also important because you can always learn from each other. So we used a drum circle to break down those barriers of non-communication. Competition still exists, but there is now a better exchange of ideas within the company."

Catlin says that having the agents participate in a drum circle was very unique for a coat-and-tie company such as Prudential. "This organization is very service oriented, and there is a strict dress code and an emphasis on proper manners at all times," she says. "Had you told eighty-five managers that they would be beating on drums, they would have all said, 'Oh no, not me.' Arthur was pretty radical for a company like ours in his dress and manner, but he was very well received. It wasn't like we walked in and were immediately handed a drum. He gradually eased into it with some rhythm exercises."

Hull stresses that this is pure entry-level drumming. "But you should see the looks on those executives' faces after they do a two-hour drumming session," he says. "You can tell that at some point in their life, someone told them, 'Stop making that noise and grow up.' So they did. And now they've rediscovered the ability to express themselves after sitting sedentary in a bureaucratic corporate position for so many years. They realize that part of the spirit of their childhood is still available to them. Some of them will come up to me at the end and ask where can they get a drum, where can they find a community drum circle, where can they find a drum teacher."

Another thing Hull stresses is that he is not a teacher, he is a facilitator. "I do not want to turn this group of people into a class where I'm the teacher, they are the students, and they are dependent on my leadership. The attitude of a facilitator is to lead those people to lead themselves—to take them where they want to go and then get out of the way. By the time a drum circle is over, most of the time I'm not in the center anymore."

I've made myself obsolete, and the elements that make that circle work are now in the psychology of the people in that circle. They can now get together in the park next Sunday without me and have their own drum circle.

"I see a lot of drum teachers who go, 'Oh, drum circle. No problem. I can do that.' They'll step into the middle of a community drum circle and turn it into a drum class, giving out parts and making it some sort of culturally specific thing. That, of course, eliminates some people based on the kind of instruments they're holding or on their rhythmic expertise. In a community drum circle, we'll start with a basic, simple format and let the people know that it's up to them to put the meat and potatoes on the blueprint and create their own song from that."

"Even if on a given day I started out with a pattern that had a samba-like sensibility, I would let the people take it where they wanted to go with it. There are some basic, simple patterns that could be identified by an ethnomusicologist as being culturally specific. But these are patterns that can be played by the whole group no matter what kind of instrument they've got. We're talking about rhythm as the universal language."

Drumming has also been used to break down racial barriers between high school students near Sacramento. "The school has a mix of white children from mining families that live in the mountains, black kids whose families had moved from the cities to a safer environment, and Vietnamese kids whose families had settled there," says Hull. "I did drum circles there so the kids could have an experience together with a universal language, since most of the Vietnamese kids don't like speaking English."

"When the kids were ushered into the gym, I told them to make a big circle, and one third of the circle was black, one third Vietnamese and one third white. So I taught each 'color' section a part that was interactive with all the other parts. Since each group was ganged up together, each one thought their part was the most important because they couldn't hear the other parts very well. I told them that the best way to hear the whole song was to stand next to someone who

was playing a different part. All of a sudden, the three

Rhythm for Life drum circle of psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers at a Menniger Clinic conference in Topeka, Kansas.



MICHAEL NEWMAN

big groups were gone and we had black, white, Vietnamese, black, white, Vietnamese naturally. When they played the song intermixed like that, they got a big surprise. It was a whole different song. I got them to hear it from a different perspective and see how beautiful it was when your part is one of many parts, and it became one group instead of 'us' and 'them.'

At The Foundry School in San Jose, a "tough love" school where kids who have been expelled from regular school are sent for one last chance to make it or break it, drumming is used not only to help the students develop a sense of community, but also to increase self-esteem. "A lot of these students' self-worth has been eroded by abusive or neglected backgrounds," says John Malloy, director of the school. "When we do the drum circle, everyone feels how important their part is. Whether it's striking a bell at the right time or keeping a pulse, everyone feels a part of it."

A student at the school once told Hull that he came into the drumming class ready to hit someone—anyone—but was able to release his frustrations on the drums. "We try to take destructive energy and turn it into meaningful discontent, and the drum does that real well," Malloy says. "Drumming wakes the kids up to their true nature because they can play out their emotions through the drums. Once they get in touch with that true nature, we can keep drawing from that well."

Drumming circles have also been effective in women's prisons and recovery houses. "They say that drumming is calming for them, which is an issue for people in these situations," says Sedonia Cahill, who has led ritual drumming circles in such settings. "In ritual drumming we find a common, steady beat and we sometimes stay with that beat for several hours, which induces a light trance. I personally like staying right on the edge where you're part trance but very aware of where you are and what you're doing."

"The beat is very monotonous," she says, "and there is something very primal about it. There is no virtuoso performance; it's about staying together and staying with it, which isn't something we are used to doing in our culture. This style of drumming feels very female to me. It doesn't go into crescendo and climax, but stays on track in a steady way."

Ritual drumming is related to shamanistic drumming. According to *The Way of the Shaman* by Michael Harner, "Contemporary shamanism, like that in most tribal cultures, typically utilizes monotonous percussion sound to enter an altered state of consciousness.... Specific techniques long used in shamanism, such as change in state of consciousness, stress-reduction, visualization, positive thinking and assistance from non-ordinary sources, are some of the approaches now widely employed in contemporary holistic practice."

The book goes on to explain that the shaman's drum should be played with "a strong, monotonous, unvarying and rapid beat. There should be no contrast in intensity of the drum beats or in the intervals between them. A drumming tempo of about 205 to 220 beats per minute is usually effective...."

"Some people think that the ritual drumming I'm doing is shamanistic drumming," Cahill says. "But it's not. With shaman drumming, only one person is playing the beat. Ritual drumming is a group experience. The rhythm we play is very steady, but it has a slight variation to it and has a livelier sound than just straight, even notes. It's a matter of everyone coming together on a common beat. Something happens when you put your individuality aside for a while and move into this common river of sound."

Like many, Cahill believes that people's affinity for rhythm and drumming comes in part from prenatal hearing of the mother's heartbeat as well as from our own internal pulse. "I take people out in the desert for ten-day vision quests," Cahill says. "Sometimes they spend three days and nights alone in the desert without eating, and their senses get very heightened. Some report that they heard drumming the whole time, and then they figure out that it's their own heartbeat."

Getting in touch with primal instincts is one reason that many men's groups include drumming as part of their meetings. "It's also a way for the men to get intimate in a safe way," says Hull, who facilitates drum circles for the California Men's Gathering. "When you drum, you are creating a kinesthetic massage that touches everyone within the circle and gives you an intimate connection with all the other men. It's touchy-feely without the touching. The energy of the drums is vibrating the whole group."

"Women also understand the intimacy of the drums," Hull says. "Ten years ago, there was a lot of men's ego competition going on in the hand drumming community. But when women started coming into the circles, they taught us grace and finesse and how to listen to each other."

A women's circle is described in the book *The Ceremonial Circle*, co-written by Cahill and Joshua Halpern.

The women arrive singly and in deep silence, pulled into the magic of the circle by the pulse of the large council drum that was handmade for the group....

As the drum enters and vibrates into the matrix of the circle, one woman will feel the impulse to allow a deep, primal sound to issue from her being, then another will answer, then another and another until a deeply moving conversation has been established. This may continue for an hour. Often because of tender or vulnerable places

that have been touched the sounds turn into moans or wails, sometimes tearful sobbing. At other times they become laughter.

When this is finished the women may move into a muffled drumming and rattling and a verbal dialogue will be introduced by a member who needs an issue discussed in council. Because of the strong, nonverbal, and heartfelt connection that has been established, and because the continuous playing of the drum maintains that connection, the women are able to discuss sensitive issues in a manner that is more devoted to truth and clarity than to smaller concerns....

Community drum circles often bring odd combinations of people together, from those who are quite accomplished on various percussion instruments to those who have never played an instrument in their lives. “We have physicists, schoolteachers, nurses, Deadheads, professional musicians, college kids, and people from the community just interested in drumming,” says Sandy Blocker, who participates in a drumming circle in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Typically, one or more of the accomplished players will stand in the center and serve as a focal point. Sometimes specific parts will be assigned with less accomplished players given simple, basic patterns and more adept players given more complex parts. In some circles, players first learn a part by singing it, after which they transfer it to the drum. Participants are often encouraged to improvise around their part once they feel comfortable with it, but many are content to simply lock in with the fundamental pulse.

And it doesn't matter what type of drum they bring. “When I facilitated a drum circle in Salt Lake City, a number of people brought homemade instruments,” says Hull. “I saw Coke cans with rocks in them, plastic water bottles with the neck cut off that people played like a hand drum, wooded salad bowls struck with wooden spoons—anything and everything. I did a radio promo and said that it was open to everyone, and if you couldn't find an instrument or make one, just bring your body and clap your hands. That works too, because when you are dealing with the universal aspect of rhythm, it doesn't matter if you have a \$1,000 conga drum or a Coke can filled with rocks. You are just as important in that circle as any master drummer there. And we need the full spectrum, including people to hold the bottom down just by playing the pulse. If everyone was a hotshot drummer who was too good to just hold that simple bottom part, we'd be top heavy and fall over. A community drum circle needs everybody from beginners to advanced players to make it happen.”

While many community drum circles are culturally

non-specific and feature a variety of instruments playing generic rhythms, others are based around specific traditions, such as the West African based circle that Blocker participates in. In fact, the whole tradition of Latin and African drumming involves ensembles of drummers and percussionists, and it's primarily the American-based jazz and rock tradition in which a single drummer keeps the beat on a drumset—an instrument designed to imitate the sound of several drummers. Jazz drummer Max Roach refers to the drumset as the “multiple percussion instrument.”

Still, many have become involved with hand drums primarily for personal satisfaction and don't regularly play in circles. “If the economy or pollution or whatever got so bad as to no longer allow for the manufacture of drumsets as we know them, I could be happy sitting under a tree playing a hand drum, because everything is there,” says Terry Bozzio. “You can have a million drums, like I do, and not be able to do what Zakir Hussain does on two tabla drums, because he's an incredible master.

“It also ties back to a simpler way of life,” Bozzio says. “One reason I went back to playing acoustic drums instead of electronics is that my spontaneity was destroyed by having to make so many decisions before I could actually play. And even an acoustic drumset takes time and energy to transport and set up. But a little frame drum with a goatskin head is lightweight, easily accommodated, and you can play it instantly.”

Bozzio came to appreciate the instant accessibility of hand drums several years ago when he was in France playing a concert with a group called the Lonely Bears. “One of the other artists who performed, a percussionist named Abed Azrie, played one hand drum—a tar—and a little tambourine,” Bozzio recalled in a *Modern Drummer* interview. “He also had some sampled percussion sounds that he triggered. It was an interesting synthesis of old and new.

“I went to dinner with him and the other musicians in his group that night, and after the meal they all pulled out their instruments and started to play. Abed pulled two tars out of his handbag, and he started playing one of them and handed me the other one. He just played with his fingers, but the sound coming out of his little drum was everything you could ever want from a kick and a snare.”

Bozzio subsequently got together with Azrie on several occasions to learn basic hand drum technique and study Arabian rhythms. He also borrowed three hand drums from Azrie, which he used on the track “Trois Tambours De Abed”—“Three Drums of Abed”—on the first Lonely Bears album.

“One day during the time I had his drums on loan in Paris, I started playing these grooves while we were stuck in hectic Parisian traffic,” Bozzio recalls.

"It had a very calming, meditative effect on me and my friend who was driving. All the smog and honking and crazed Parisians didn't matter anymore. We were in our own little space grooving as we drove through traffic."

After years of playing with sticks, Bozzio has come to appreciate the direct contact between his hand and the drum. "Something happens when you put your hand directly on the skin of a drum that is a step removed when you use a stick," Bozzio says. "There's an intimacy because it's a real tactile thing."

John Wyre says that, ideally, there should be no difference between playing with your hands or using sticks. "If you play for a long, long time, the stick should simply become an extension of your hand" he says. "I've certainly had that feeling playing timpani, which has been the basis of most of my performing career outside of Nexus."

"But that's easier said than done. I think with most people, the stick tends to get in the way between the body and the instrument. When you play directly with your hand, you are one step closer to getting your energy and the vibrations of the instrument to coalesce. You can certainly feel the vibrations of the drum much more subtly and quickly when it's just your hand touching it. You can feel the sound as well as hear it."

"It is easy to get distracted by some of the technical things we deal with," Wyre adds. "You're always looking for the right stick and changing the way you hold it. If you're a hand drummer, you sometimes change the way you play, but it's a little more natural, I think, than some of the experiments we get into with mallets."

John Bergamo, who teaches percussion at the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts), says that a single frame drum offers a full range of expression. "You've got all the sticks you need right on your hand,"

he says. "You've got hard beaters with your knuckles and fingernails and soft beaters with the fleshy parts of your hand, and you can get different open and closed sounds. It can offer a great deal of pure playing satisfaction to people."

Some people attach great significance to the different tones that the drums produce. In her Interworld video *Ritual Drumming* and CD *Since the Beginning*, Layne Redmond relates the four basic sounds of her tambourine to the elements: "kah," a muffled slap stroke, is the earth; "dom," the deep, open, ringing sound, represents water; "tak," the rimshot-like combination of head and rim, is the sound of fire; "cha," the rim-only sound that produces the brightest sound from the jingles, is air.

Arthur Hull distinguishes between three basic tones that exist in a drum circle. "The first is the bass note, which provides the kinesthetic massage," Hull says. "The bass note makes the dancers dance. The real question is, do drummers make dancers dance, or do dancers make drummers drum? The answer is yes. It's a chicken-and-egg kind of thing."

"Then there are the mid-range tones that come out of any hand drum and sing to the heart and the emotions. It's the release that lets you sing your joy and pain through your instrument."

"Finally are the high-pitched head tones provided by slaps and shekeres. Those tones stop thought, and thought is time. If you stop thinking, time stops. When we are all playing together, we don't realize how long we've been playing because we have stopped the passage of time in our heads. When you get to that place, you have achieved rhythmic bliss. You have become one mind, one spirit, one rhythm with that drum circle. You are not just playing a part, you *are* a part."

Many schools have added hand drumming and world music courses over the past few years, including the Berklee College of Music in Boston, which has offered



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a hand-drum major since 1991 and is sponsoring a World Percussion Festival from August 15-20. Bergamo has definitely seen an increased interest in hand drums over the past five years at CalArts. "Most of the students are coming from a drumset or percussion background," he says. "I have yet to see anybody start out as a hand drummer, but I think that will be happening in the next generation. We've got very formal classes in Ghanaian drumming, two kinds of Indonesian drumming—Balinese and Javanese—South Indian drumming, North Indian drumming and Latin percussion.

"I also teach a generic hand drumming class to whoever wants to take it. I have a cellist, a pianist, a couple of dancers and people from the film school; I don't think any of them are drummers. They're coming for different reasons. The pianist is finding that it's benefiting her piano playing because she's discovered another way of relaxation with her hands.

"Hand drums have become the folk guitars of the '90s," Bergamo says. "People are discovering that drumming can be done on a very basic level where everyone can participate. A lot of people are into the drum circle environment, but I'm more into what you can do with a hand drum by yourself. Take your drum out in the woods and play just to have fun."

All of these drummers must certainly be a boon for the music industry, right? Guess again. In many towns your best source for a hand drum is a new-age bookshop or an African clothing store, not a traditional music store. And much of the hand and ethnic percussion on display at PASIC '94 in Atlanta came from small drum makers and importers that you'd never find at a NAMM show.

"It's been an uphill challenge to get the music-products industry to recognize new markets and go after them," says Remo Director of Marketing Lloyd McCausland, whose company makes a variety of hand percussion instruments to serve both hobbyists and pros. "When people started getting interested in hand drums a few years ago, they couldn't find drums in the regular music stores. So the new-age shops and bookstores that were selling men's-movement books and Mickey Hart's book *Planet Drum* started selling drums. A good part of our sales are through these stores and gift-catalog houses.

"After the January '96 NAMM show, sixty-two music dealers visited the Remo factory. I showed them a video of 1,500 people drumming on the beach with Mickey Hart and Arthur Hull, and when they saw those numbers playing drums and realized they didn't get any of those sales, they began to get interested."

Sandy Blocker started his own shop, Talking Drums, two years ago because of his frustrations at trying to buy a djembe head in Greensboro. His shop caters to the hand drum crowd, and he doesn't stock

a single drumset. He gets a few instruments from Remo, LP, Gon-Bops and Mid-East Manufacturing, but most of his instruments come from small companies such as Rhythm Fusion, Crafton Percussion and Heartbeat Drums.

"The stores here in town were upset when I first opened because I took all their conga business," Blocker says. "But now they're glad I'm open, and they'll call me up and say, 'We're sending some more of those weirdos over to your place.'"

Classifying people who bang on hand drums as "weirdos" is of special concern to Barry Bernstein, a music therapist who serves as program director for Rhythm for Life, a non-profit organization dedicated to "the study and use of percussive sound...for the benefit of individuals and the community."

"Music therapy as a profession is very well-established and has a strong research base, and the medical profession is really starting to look at music and sound as an alternative form of providing healthcare," says Bernstein. "The important thing is how the message is presented. If you get up there and go, 'Yeah, maaaaan, we're going to drum and it's going to be groovy and far out,' then it's going to be perceived like some hippie thing."

Rhythm for Life was formed as a result of testimony presented to the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging during its hearing entitled "Forever Young: Music and Aging," which was held in August, 1991. Various music therapists, physicians and musicians testified to the benefits of music in the lives and health of older citizens.

In particular, Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart spoke of the importance of rhythm and drumming. "Drumming, the rhythmic manipulation of sound, can be used for health and healing," Hart said. "We are embedded within a rhythmic universe. Everywhere we see rhythm—patterns moving through time. It is there in the cycles of the seasons, in the migration of the birds and the animals, in the fruiting and withering of plants, and in the birth, maturation and death of ourselves.... We find that all cultures have music of some kind. It is inherent to the nature of man...."

"Today, without thoroughly understanding it, thousands of people across the country have turned to drumming as a form of practice like prayer, meditation or the martial arts," Hart said. "Typically, people gather to drum in drum circles with others from the surrounding community to share rhythm and get in tune with each other and themselves, to form a group consciousness, to entrain and resonate."

Hart said that although most older Americans were unfamiliar with the hand drumming movement, they were the people who could benefit most, and those

benefits would include "immediate reduction in feelings of loneliness and alienation through interaction with each other.... Whereas verbal communication can often be difficult among the generations, in the drum circle, non-verbal communication is the means of relating. Natural by-products of this are increased self-esteem and the resulting sense of empowerment, creativity and enhanced ability to focus the mind—not to mention just plain fun. All this reduces stress and is a safe form of exercise that invigorates, energizes and centers...."

"The introduction of drum circles and percussion instruments into the older American population is a new medicine for a new culture. It was a good idea 10,000 years ago and it is a good idea today."

Music therapist Dr. Alicia Clair then testified about the work that she and Bernstein have done over the past ten years with Alzheimer's Disease patients using rhythm-based therapy, which substantiated many of Hart's claims.

Following months of discussions between representatives of the Senate Special Committee of Ag-

ing, the National Association for Music Therapy, the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) and other interested parties, Rhythm for Life was formed in March, 1992. Its advisory council includes Dr. Oliver Sacks (whom Robin Williams portrayed in the film *Awakenings*), Mickey Hart, Remo Belli, Arthur Hull, Ed Thigpen and Interworld Music president Gerry James.

"The concept of the use of rhythm in therapy is very provocative," says Bob Morrison, who works for NAMM in the area of market development. "Rhythm for Life provided strong data that, with some seed funding from NAMM, they would be able to create materials and background information to help our members understand the role that rhythm is now playing in therapeutic issues. It fits hand-in-hand with NAMM's mission to expand the market for music products and related accessories as well as to expand that portion of the population that makes its own music. The use of hand drumming in therapy has opened up an incredible opportunity to serve a new market."

"There has also been research on early childhood



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Barry Bernstein (center) plays a Drum Table with Alzheimer's patients.



development that indicates that music is exercise for the brain and leads to a higher level of development. So we're now talking about marketing implications from cradle to grave. It's a good time for our industry, but we have to work hard to take advantage of these opportunities."

Rhythm for Life's projects have included studying the effects of rhythm-based activities for impaired and at-risk residents of nursing homes, developing a rhythmic exploratory play project for emotionally disturbed adolescents to support self-esteem, positive peer identification and non-verbal communication, and pilot projects in prisons, halfway houses and drug rehabilitation programs using ritual drumming to create a sense of community and belonging and to encourage personal empowerment.

One of Rhythm for Life's most important projects has been a major study on the effect playing drums had on Alzheimer's patients. "Our subjects were able to increase the complexity of rhythms they played and learn new strokes," Bernstein says. "That is really important, because literature about people with Alzheimer's disease repeatedly says that they are unable to learn new tasks. So first and foremost, our research project demonstrated that that's not true. When activities are presented to them that they are capable of processing neurologically, they *are* able to learn new tasks.

"As healthcare professionals, we are also looking at ways we can improve quality of life. We need to do further research on this, but the reports we are getting from nursing personnel is that after the Alzheimer's patients have finished drumming, their agitation and anxiousness is greatly reduced for an extended period of time. It's possible that by using activities such as this, medication can be reduced and nursing staffs can be smaller."

Bernstein says that Alzheimer's patients work best with floor-tom style instruments that allow the patient's knees or legs to touch the instrument and

that allow the therapist to sit directly across from the patient making eye contact. "Working with mallets can be more successful with Alzheimer's patients," Bernstein says. "We also use the Paddle Drum that Remo makes and some of the shaman-type drums that can be held with one hand. We have to be concerned with the weight of the drum and the way you hold it, and also with older people's skin being very tender. I would never use a conga drum with a geriatric population."

As a result of his research, Bernstein and Remo designed the Drum Table—a fifty-inch diameter hexagonal table with a PTS drumhead for a top that people can sit around and play with mallets or hands. "We got a higher level of participation when people could feel the vibrations," Bernstein says. "We call that 'vibrotactile stimulation.' The Drum Table is designed so that people in regular chairs or wheelchairs can have their legs underneath the vibrating membrane."

Despite his positive results with Alzheimer's patients, Bernstein is careful to avoid using the words "drumming" and "healing" in the same sentence. "The word 'healing' can be used rather loosely," he explains. "We don't want people to infer that someone can cure themselves of cancer by going to a drum circle. At the same time, we're not saying that such an activity cannot be part of the curative process. We call drumming a wellness tool, a preventative tool, but we're careful not to say that drumming is a healing experience.

"I've had experiences both personally and observationally in drumming events where people have come in with a lot of stress or they're just tired, and they get totally energized from the group experience. Some would define that as healing. But we want to speak to as many people as possible without alienating anyone, and so we have to be careful of the language we use."

Hull is also careful about using the word "healing,"

but he has no doubt that drumming has a powerful effect on people. "I had a very profound experience with a group of autistic kids," he says. "I did a program with twelve autistic kids who had never all reacted to the same thing at the same time before. Sometimes a couple of them would pop out of that strange world they live in for a little bit, but then they would go back. So I went in this room with these twelve kids, and each one had a caretaker who kept them from hurting themselves. I started playing a drum, and sure enough, two of the kids popped out into this reality and grabbed my drum and started hitting it. Then another kid jumped up and started running around the room.

"It became pandemonium," Hull says. "Some kids were banging their heads against the drums, some were shrieking, and so forth. I didn't realize the profoundness of what was happening until I noticed that all of the caretakers were crying. They had never seen all twelve kids come out of their autistic world at the same time. The drums did that."

The connection between music and healing is an ancient one. According to *The Healing Drum* by Yaya Diallo (a member of the Minianka tribe of West Africa) and Mitchell Hall, "In the Minianka villages of Fienso and Zangasso, the musicians were healers, the healers musicians. The word musician itself implies the role of healer. From the Minianka perspective, it is inconceivable that the responsibilities for making music and restoring health should be separate, as they are in the West."

**T**here are some who contend that hand drumming is simply a fad that will capture the public's fancy for a short time and then quickly burn out. But where a typical fad tends to capture a specific segment of society, hand drumming is turning up in groups of people who have absolutely no

connection with each other. And unlike hoola-hoops, Davy Crockett, Beatlemania or disco, hand drumming is grounded in centuries of tradition.

"The popularity of hand drumming is not based on any kind of marketing scheme," says Remo Belli, whose own interest in hand drumming was sparked by seeing Glen Velez perform at a PAS convention several years ago. "This movement is societal—brought on by a need that is out there. People are using rhythm and drums as an expression of wanting to live a different kind of lifestyle.

"This is probably the biggest musical activity the music industry has ever seen—and they thought rock 'n' roll was big. Rock 'n' roll was an important social force for one or two generations of people during a specific period of history, but its social influence is now over. The hand drumming movement is tied more profoundly to more people and more diverse thoughts.

"The wellness issue alone takes in everybody that's alive, and as more people understand the connection between music and wellness, the whole perception of what music is about will change. Musicians started off as entertainers, and then we became educators. But watching entertainers didn't make everybody go out and buy musical instruments, and having music taught in schools didn't stop music from being removed from the curriculum when money got tight. They won't cut sports from the school programs because people believe that participation in sports is good for the health of an individual. We want people to understand that active participation in music is also good for them.

"It's going to take a long time," Belli says. "Today, everybody is talking about high fibre and low sugar. I've been involved in holistic medicine for years, and I heard people delivering papers about high fibre and low sugar twenty-five years ago. It's taken that long for society to understand that that's the direction people should go."



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Why is it happening now with so many different people? "There is something really essential here," says Hull. "Everyone who traces their ancestry back to the cultures where their great, great, great, great grandparents came from will find that those source cultures used a drum in some way to connect people to each other as well as to connect people to the earth. Somewhere along the way, the American culture lost that connection. But deep inside our cultural psyche—somewhere in our genes or DNA or something—there is still a basic need to express yourself through rhythm. Rhythm is the foundation of all art and self-expression—not just music."

Whatever the style or use of hand drumming, Bernstein feels there is a common thread. "People in the technological world we are living in are yearning to be connected," he says. "Fax machines, modems, E-mail, TV—all those things take us away from human contact. The drum offers us a way to be connected. Look at ritual and community gatherings throughout history; they all involve drumming.

"One of the goals of Rhythm for Life is to bring drumming back into the family. Turn off the TV and play drums together. It gets you talking and enlivens you, and we might not have so many family problems. I don't think that's idealistic. I think it's a real solution to some of the problems in our society right now."

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

**BOOKS**

- The Ceremonial Circle*, by Sedonia Cahill and Joshua Halpern (Harper Collins)
- The Healing Drum*, by Yaya Diallo and Mitchell Hall (Destiny)
- Drumming at the Edge of Magic*, by Mickey Hart and Jay Stevens (Harper Collins)

- Planet Drum*, by Mickey Hart and Fredric Lieberman (Harper Collins)
- The Way of the Shaman*, by Michael Harner (Harper Collins)

**VIDEOS**

- The Art and Joy of Hand Drumming*, by John Bergamo (Interworld Music)
- Community Drumming for Health and Happiness*, by Jim Greiner (LP Music Group)
- Guide to Endrumming*, by Arthur Hull (Interworld Music)
- Ritual Drumming*, by Layne Redmond (Interworld Music)

**RECORDINGS**

- The Big Bang* (Ellipsis Arts) A 3-CD set that includes drum and percussion from around the world, including performances by Mickey Hart's Planet Drum group, Brazilian percussion by Airto, Glen Velez on Egyptian riq, tabla by Zakir Hussain, African master drummer Baba Olatunji, Japanese taiko drumming, Celtic bodhran, Native American pow-wow drumming, and more.
- Doctrine of Signatures*, by Glen Velez (CMP)
- On the Edge*, by John Bergamo (CMP)
- Since the Beginning*, by Layne Redmond and the Mob of Angels (Interworld Music) PN

**Rick Mattingly** serves on the PAS Board of Directors and is Editor of *Percussive Notes*. His articles have appeared in *Modern Drummer*, *Modern Percussionist*, *Musician*, *Down Beat* and the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*. Mattingly has edited instructional books by Peter Erskine, Joe Morello, Gary Chester, Bob Moses, Bill Bruford and others, and is the author of *Creative Timekeeping*, published by Hal Leonard.



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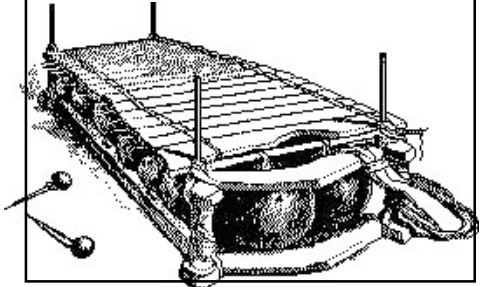
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1996

PERCUSSIVE ARTS SOCIETY

23rd ANNUAL PERCUSSION COMPOSITION

CONTEST

Purpose: The Percussive Arts Society sponsors an annual competition to encourage and reward those who create music for percussion instruments and to increase the number of quality compositions written for percussion.

1996 Categories: Category I: Marimba (Low A) with Piano Accompaniment
First Place: \$500.00 plus publication by Studio 4 Productions
Second Place: \$250.00
Third Place: \$100.00
Category II: Steel Drum Ensemble (Concert Style, No Transcriptions or Arrangements)
First Place: \$500.00 plus publication by Panyard, Inc.
Second Place: \$250.00
Third Place: \$100.00

Efforts will be made to arrange performances of the winning compositions at a future Percussion Arts Society International Convention or other PAS sponsored events.

Eligibility and Procedures: Previously commissioned or published works may not be entered. Compositions should be between 5 and 15 minutes in length. Total duration of piece should be stated on manuscript. Compositions must be original (no transcriptions or arrangements) and should be in the "Concert" rather than the "Pop" style. Clean, neat manuscript is required. Composer must send 4 copies of score. Composer's name may appear, but it will be deleted for judging purposes. All entry copies become property of PAS. The difficulty of the composition is left to the discretion of the composer. High artistic goals should be coupled with realistic demands to allow for performance at the university level. Instrument demands should also be limited to those commonly found at the university level.

Application Fee: PAS reserves the right to NOT award prizes if the judges determine there is a lack of qualified entries. \$25 per composition (non-refundable), to be enclosed with each entry. Make checks payable to the Percussive Arts Society.

Deadline: All materials (application fee, application form and manuscript(s) must be postmarked by April 1, 1996. For further information and complete details, contact: PAS, P.O. Box 25 Lawton, OK 73502-0025 (405) 353-1455

1996 PERCUSSIVE ARTS SOCIETY
23rd ANNUAL PERCUSSION COMPOSITION CONTEST

(form may be photocopied)

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I hereby certify that the enclosed composition is original and it has not been previously commissioned or published.

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