

# What is a Drum Circle Playshop?

Written by: Arthur Hull, Drum Guru

According to Mickey Hart: "The Drum Circle is a huge jam session. The ultimate goal is not precise rhythmic articulation or perfection of patterned structure, but the ability to entrain and reach the state of a group mind. It is built on cooperation in the groove, but with little reference to any classic styles. So this is a work in constant progress, a phenomenon of the new rhythm culture emerging here in the West."

In the words of Arthur Hull: "The Community Drum Circle is a fun entry-level learning experience that is accessible to anyone who wants to participate. Drum Circle participants express themselves collectively by using a chorus of tuned drums, percussion, and vocals to create a musical song together while having a great time."

The Community Drum Circle is the use of a rhythm-based event as a tool for unity. It is NOT a drum class. It's NOT using culturally-specific rhythms. A community drum circle in the United States is a fun, family friendly event, where people empower each other in the act of celebrating community and life through rhythm and music. People of all levels of musical expertise come together and share their rhythmical spirit with what ever drums and percussion they bring to the event. They don't have to be a drummer to participate. Everyone has something to offer the circle, and any one is welcome.

The spirit and magic of rhythm expressed on drums and percussion instruments cuts through all ages, sexes, religions, races and cultures. "Rhythm", as Gabriel Roth says, "is the mother tongue." Rhythm is a universal language known to every one, even the youngest child, if we can just "remember." So in a very objective, yet beautiful way, an interactive rhythm event puts us all on an equal footing with each other and brings us closer together. The facilitator serves this process by guiding the participants to their highest musical potential.

A community drum circle is created, "in the moment" by all the people who participate. Co-operation and collaboration is the basic glue. When we drum together, sharing our spirit in the form of rhythm, it changes our relationships. As we play together, we give ourselves a rhythmical massage and an emotional release.



The experience is unique to each person in the circle, and it happens whether we are entraining ourselves into the circle by drumming, or standing outside the circle and listening while tapping our feet and clapping along with the music.

There are many places where drum circles are being used for many purposes, like....

- Teambuilding for corporations
- Empowerment building for men's and women's groups
- Spirit building for spiritual growth and personal growth groups
- Synergizing and rhythm training for school/kids groups
- Stress and anger relief for kids- at-risk groups
- Orientation for college campuses and on-going circles for multi-cultural awareness.
- Family bonding for family night drum circles.
- Community building.

To make beautiful music together, all we have to do is bring to the circle whatever rhythmical expertise we have to offer, along with the excitement of sharing it with other people. The quality of the music produced in an event like this is not based on the rhythmical expertise of the players, but on the quality of their relationship with the other people in the circle.

The result is those magical musical moments where one powerful voice is created out of the many. In those moments, the players stop worrying about keeping time because time, as they know it, has stopped. In it's place is a living breathing entity, expressing timeless joy, passion and release through the power of rhythm. **That is the beauty of a community drum circle playshop.**

# Drumming Towards Wellness

Written by: John Hagedorn

A CIRCLE of Native American hunters strike taut head of the Mother Drum as costumed dancers chant and summon spirits. A wizened shaman taps an idiosyncratic code on his drum's surface, unlocking powers from the nether world to abet his healing ceremony. .

Phoenician Priestesses attend a birth, timbrel in hand, to strengthen the mother and welcome her newborn child with their rhythms.

All metaphysical mumbo jumbo? Quaint lore from a bygone era? Maybe not.

The ancients were right. Rhythm heals. They knew that in addition to accompanying their ceremonies and rituals, drumming almost certainly contributed to their health and wellbeing.

Today, research into the health benefits of group drumming confirms that participants demonstrate strengthened immune systems and reduced levels of job burnout and work stress after experimental drumming sessions.

Although it is common knowledge that listening to and playing music can promote relaxation, research conducted by neurologist Dr Barry Bittman (et al) of the Meadville Medical Center's Mind Body Wellness Center in Pennsylvania, US and funded by drum makers Remo Inc shows that group drumming provides more than just a feel-good feeling. It can actually condition our cells.

Natural Killer (NK) cells are key components of our immune system that help seek out and destroy cancer cells and viruses. The activity of these cells is affected by stress.

Medical research has confirmed that people with higher stress levels show lower NK cell activity and vice versa.

"This is why," says Bittman, "chronic stressors such as care-giving for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, marital separation and divorce and examination stress in medical students appear to suppress immunologic reactivity."

With this in mind, Bittman and his team set out to determine whether group drumming might reverse these effects.

A drumming strategy was tested on 111 people. Those who drummed showed significant increased NK cell activity compared to control groups who did not. What does this mean for the future of immunological medicine?

Says Bittman, "I'm hoping our research provides the impetus for hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centres, senior centres, nursing homes and insurers to integrate group drumming as a valuable intervention within traditional medicine."

Bittman also concluded that group drumming also helped to minimise humour in student nurses.

"Burnout" is a condition we're all familiar with. It comes from high work demands and insufficient emotional and physical reserves to meet them. Many of these demands, such as personal and family challenges, financial concerns, academic demands, lack of time for friends and family, and job-related emotions were cited as causes of burnout among nursing professionals.

Research suggests that healthy self-care techniques incorporated into the nursing curriculum will not only enable students to cope with job-related stress, but also improve the quality of the care they provide. Bittman and his team set out to show that group drumming might provide the self care techniques that student nurses require.

A group of 75 student nurses completed a course of six weekly one-hour sessions of group drumming. Activities selected included relaxation exercises and opportunities for participants to express themselves nonverbally on their drums.

"Rather than attempting to learn complex rhythms," writes Bittman, "the students) played drums and percussion instruments in an expressive, non-performance-based manner designed to ensure a relaxing, enjoyable musical experience." Using a composite score called Total Mood Disturbance (TMD) derived from several emotional factors, Bittman's team determined that the group drumming sessions helped improve feelings associated with burnout and negative mood states.



Even though some of the students had initially complained that the sessions were wasting their valuable time, many began to look forward to them, commenting later how good it felt to laugh and draw closer to their classmates.

Stress relief is one of the drum's greatest powers. Psychotherapist Robert Friedman explains this in his book. *The Healing Power of the Drum*. "When one hits the drum," he writes "he or she is placed squarely in the here and now. Some of our stress is created from past or future thoughts of fear, worry or regrets but it is very difficult to be stressed in the present moment"

Friedman cites the work of clinical psychologist Dr Barry Quinn, who has studied Alpha brain waves over the past 11 years. Our brains produce Alpha waves when we relax. These keep the mind idle when it is not focused and help to produce a sense of well-being.

In a 30-minute session of meditation, the brain spends about 20 minutes in an Alpha state before passing into a deeper Theta state. People who have higher amounts of Alpha waves have been found to dream more clearly, while those with lower amounts have more stress.

According to Quinn's studies, 20% of the population has no Alpha brain waves at all. He refers to these people as hyper-vigilant. In other words, they can't turn their minds off. They don't cope well with emotional issues and many develop addictions and sleep disorders. Anything, says Quinn, that would increase their Alpha waves would be beneficial to them.

"I found that 50% of the (hyper-vigilant patients) I tested got a normal Alpha wave pattern after 30 minutes of drumming, which means that their Alpha waves doubled.

Drumming as therapy is resurgent. Developments in the field have produced a new breed of shamans and priestesses in modern incarnations as professional counsellors, healers and community drum circle facilitators.

Friedman reports that in his work, drumming creates states of euphoria, induces light trance, promotes play, reduces anger develops feelings of community and unity.

Ancient wisdom may have been supplanted with the advent of modern medicine, but current research demonstrates that we may benefit from what we have forgotten. Drumming is a multi-purpose healing tool that people can enjoy on many different levels.

It seems we have merely added scientific credibility to what our patients have known all along," says Bittman.

"From a global perspective, our findings simply serve to validate the wisdom of the ancients."

## Sources.

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- 2) The Healing Power of the Drum, Parts I & II by Robert Lawrence Friedman. [www.remo.com/portal/pages/health\\_rhythm/library\\_article8.html](http://www.remo.com/portal/pages/health_rhythm/library_article8.html)
- 3) Recreational Music Making: An Integrative Group Intervention for Reducing Burnout and Improving Mood States in First Year Associate Degree Nursing Students by Dr Barry B. Bittmann (et al) International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship. Volume 1, Issue 1 2004.

# Drumming Towards Wellness

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While the foundations of wellness are unique to each of us, when it comes to our basic needs, we share much in common. Physical, emotional and spiritual components of well-being are sacred and inseparable.

According to Alicia Clair, Ph.D., MT-BC, Professor and the Director of Music Therapy at the University of Kansas, "Customarily people have interpreted good health as the absence of illness or disease, but more recently wellness has come to a new meaning, feeling as good as one can feel regardless of diagnosis. This new interpretation of wellness is reflected in a shift from medical professional control and management to individuals' assumed responsibility for 'feeling good.' It is broadly understood that 'being well' results from engagement in activities that lead to and maintain health."

To a great extent, the lifestyle choices we choose today will certainly be reflected in the future we create one step at a time. For health is not a goal-- it is a journey traveled throughout our lifetime.

Barry Bittman, MD and Anthony DeFail summed it up in their book, *Maze of Life*: "It's the way you choose to live your life that counts. Ultimately it's a matter of choice."

## And where do these choices lead?

They pave the way to a path of personal discovery where the elements that have particular meaning for us become the building blocks for creating a balanced and healthy life.

## What are these elements?

While so many exist, the most basic ones are reflected in an "attitude" of wellness which includes diet, exercise, nurturing, social support, spiritual practice, intellectual stimulation, stress reduction, coping skills and creative expression.

The challenge for each of us is finding time for creating a healthy balance. It's not surprising that in our fast-paced society it's difficult to establish a routine that allows us to blend our wellness choices in a healthy manner. And that's precisely where this form of music-making fits in.

Group drumming harnesses so many elements of wellness in one activity that anyone can enjoy. According to Karl Bruhn, Father of the Music-Making and Wellness Movement, "without the obstacle of a challenging learning curve, group drumming is an enjoyable, accessible and fulfilling activity from the start for young and old alike. From exercise, nurturing and social support, to intellectual stimulation, spirituality and stress reduction, group drumming stimulates creative expression that unites our minds, bodies and spirits!"

It is truly an extraordinary blend of time-tested elements that simply make sense in the overall scheme of maintaining and preserving the gift of a healthy life. Yet there's more.

Group drumming can also serve as a rather effective means for restoring a sense of inner balance amidst the incredible challenges of life. Referring to a drum circle held for students and parents one year after a tragic high school event, Christine Stevens, MT/BC said, "Parents and children came to our drum circle silent, apprehensive and disconnected. At first it was difficult to even maintain eye contact. Knowing words could never communicate what each of us felt that day, we slowly began drumming together. The sadness we shared was overwhelming at first, as tears dampened our hands and instruments. Yet as we drummed, renewed support for each other and a collective sense of hope for a better tomorrow gradually replaced our despair. Our experience was more than therapeutic-- it connected us on many levels."

After all, our ability to connect with and support each other is why we're here in the first place. It doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to realize group drumming is an incredible unifying tool that simply brings out the best in us.

According to Remo Belli, the Founder and CEO of Remo, Inc., "It's time to stop thinking of the drum as a musical instrument. Start thinking of it as a recreational tool for every family, a wellness tool for every retiree, and an educational tool for every classroom."

We agree and encourage you to join us in our Drum Circle Playshops and learn more about this incredible wellness and teambuilding strategy. That's what HealthRHYTHMS is all about-- learning, discovering, enjoying and sharing musical insights that can help everyone improve the quality of their lives.

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Remo Belli, Founder & CEO, Remo Inc.

## Strengthens the Immune System

Composite Effects of Group Drumming Music Therapy on Modulation of Neuroendocrine-Immune Parameters in Normal Subjects (2001)  
Bittman MD, Berk LS, Felten DL, Westengard J, Simonton OD, Pappas J, Ninehouse M

Alternative Ther Health Med 2001: 7:38-47

### Objective:

To determine the role of group-drumming music therapy as a composite activity with potential for alteration of stress-related hormones and enhancement of immunologic measures associated with natural killer cell activity and cell-mediated immunity.

### Conclusions:

Drumming is a complex composite intervention with the potential to modulate specific neuroendocrine and neuroimmune parameters in a direction opposite to that expected with the classic stress response.

## Improves Mood States and Reduces Burnout

Recreational Music-Making: A Cost-Effective Group Interdisciplinary Strategy for Reducing Burnout and Improving Mood States in Long-Term Care Workers (2003)

Bittman MD, Karl T. Bruhn, Christine Stevens, MSW, MT-BC, James Westengard, Paul O Umbach, MA

Advances in Mind-Body Medicine Fall/Winter 2003, Vol. 19 No. 3/4

### Hypothesis:

A cost-effective Yamaha Clavinova-based HealthRHYTHMS Recreational Music-Making protocol reduces burnout and improves mood states in long-term care workers.

### What we studied:

At Westbury United Methodist Retirement Community we studied 112 employees' mood states (POMS-Profile of Mood States & MBI-Maslach Burnout Inventory) including: tension/anxiety (T/A), depression/dejection (D/D), anger/hostility (A/H), vigor/activity (V/A), fatigue/inertia (F/I) and confusion/bewilderment (C/B). Total Mood Disturbance (TMD) is the sum of the above mood parameters weighing V/A negatively.

### What we found:

A 46% improvement in total mood disturbance, and 62% improvement 6 weeks post intervention. Economic Impact projections -- a typical 100 bed long-term care facility would expect to experience an 18.3% overall reduction in employee turnover. Retention of 11 of 60 positions predicted to be lost each year would result in an average cost savings of \$89,100 per year. Total annual savings to the industry based on an 18.3% decrease in turnover at every long-term care facility is therefore projected at \$1.46 billion.

## Reverses Stress on the Genomic Level

Recreational Music-Making Modulates the Human Stress Response: A Preliminary Individualized Gene Expression Strategy. (2005)

Bittman, B., Berk, L., Shannon, M., Sharaf, M., Westengard, J., Guegler, K.J., and Ruff, D.W.

Medical Science Monitor, February 2005

MEADVILLE, PA—A groundbreaking study published in the February 2005 issue of the international research journal *Medical Science Monitor* shows for the first time that playing a musical instrument can reverse multiple components of the human stress response on the genomic level. The study's principal investigator, Barry Bittman, M.D. of the Mind-Body Wellness Center in Meadville, PA, says these unique findings not only shed new light on the value of active music participation, but also extend our understanding of individualized human biological stress responses on an unprecedented level.