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Chapter 1



What Is a Drum Circle?

A drum circle is a musical gathering. But a drum circle is more than just the 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*.

Drum circles are a form of *recreational music making*, which means that the focus is not on performance but rather on personal or group development and wellness, or just plain fun. The word *recreational* actually means “refreshment of strength and spirits after work.” Playing music that renews our spirits is recreational.

Recreational music making is

- less about playing tunes and more about **tuning into our playfulness**;
- less about re-creating what others have done before and more about **co-creating something in the moment**;
- less about being on stage and more about reaching **new stages of being**;
- less about tuning out the environment and more about **tuning into your heart**.

Of course, the concept of recreational music making is nothing new. Before there were televisions, video games and the Internet, people would often gather in a living room or porch to sing songs, play their favorite tunes and drum

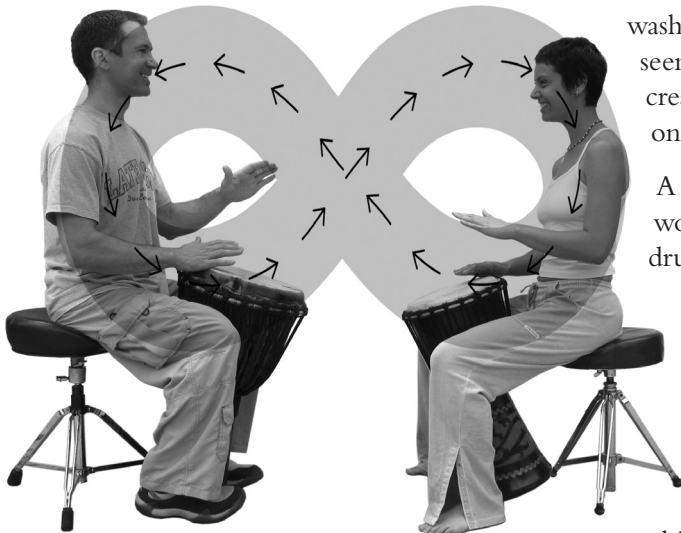
out the rhythms of the day on a washboard or bucket. Thankfully, we seem to be remembering the importance of taking time to create music in a social atmosphere once again.

A drum circle can be simply defined as “a group of people working together to create in-the-moment music using drums and percussion instruments.” Key words and phrases are *group*, *working together*, *create*, and *in-the-moment*. A drum circle is not a percussion ensemble performing a prepared piece of music, or a drumming class led by a teacher, nor any group that is re-creating music it has played before. It’s a unique event that is spontaneously created by the participants, preferably with the help of a facilitator—a musical guide who helps the group achieve its goals.

When two people play drums together, each person is listening to the other, and they simultaneously create new music based on what they hear and feel. The music from one player enters the other through the ears, travels through the heart, and flows back out through the instrument to the first player. This process can be thought of as an *infinite rhythm loop* that connects people through a dynamic process of communication and expression.

I see their souls, and I hold them in my hands, and because I love them they weigh nothing.

—Pearl Bailey



Drum Technique (for bongos and dumbek)



Low Note



High Note

Note: Some of the drums we use in drum circles such as the dumbek, conga, bongos and jembe are traditional or classical instruments from other cultures. To show respect for the instruments and the cultures from which they come, I often include some background information for groups who may have never played these instruments before, and I encourage everyone to treat these instruments with the same respect and care they would give a violin, guitar or any other classical instrument. This means acknowledging that the drums are musical instruments, capable of being played at very high levels by professional musicians and not things to be used as tables or chairs. To discourage people from setting objects on the instruments, suggest that they be placed on their sides or covered when not in use. Of course, it's a good idea to extend this concept of respect to all the other types of percussion instruments as well.

Frame Drums

A frame drum (often called a *hand drum* in the music education field) may be defined as a drum that has one head and is wider than it is deep. It is perhaps the most common drum design throughout the world. Most frame drums produce a round, dark tone. In a drum circle setting, they are often played with mallets or sticks, but can also be played with the hands and/or fingers. Frame drums are preferred over flat “pancake-style” drums because they are durable, easy to hold, and sound great.

Some popular types of frame drums:

bendir (BEN-deer) Middle Eastern

bodhran (boh-RAHN) Irish

buffalo drum Native American

tamborim (tam-boh-REEM) Brazilian

tar North African



bendir



bodhran



buffalo drum



tamborim



tar

Rainbow hand drums This set of five graduated hand drums is available from Peripole-Bergerault, Inc. They are recommended for activities that would benefit from having drums of different colors.



rainbow
hand drums

Wood Sounds

The DCMI symbol for wood sounds is the rectangle, the shape of wood blocks. In many cultures, sticks and bones are associated with ancestral knowledge, teaching and wisdom. Sticks and bones are thought of by many as the original or “first” percussion instruments.

clapper sticks These long wooden sticks are cut down the middle and feature a hollow core that deepens the tone. They are found in Korean and Native American music.

clave (KLAH-vay) Claves consist of a pair of hardwood sticks that are struck together. They are traditionally used in music from Latin America.



clapper sticks



claves