

Contemporary Women Drummers and Social Action: Focus on Community Service

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This paper explores the work of six American women who are using their drumming and teaching skills to benefit their communities. Populations served include children, teens, adults, and elders, as well as those with movement and cognitive disorders. Group drumming is employed to bring people together, as a form of occupational therapy, and as a vehicle for confronting personal and large scale trauma, as well as natural disasters. The community work of these women evokes a sense of independence, purpose, and connection in drumming participants in a fun, relaxed context. Regional women's drumming groups are also explored.

A History of Contemporary Women's Drumming

Throughout the centuries, music making has been a mode of self-expression, and drumming is no exception. Playing drums (drumming) is a global phenomenon that unites people in community for a multitude of purposes, including social conviviality; rites of passage such as birth, graduation, weddings, and funerals; healing and religious ceremonies; and in some areas of the world, preparation for war (McNeill, 1995). While in European, Middle Eastern and South American countries women have traditionally played drums (Redmond, 1997), in the United States drumming has often been associated with males. This is largely the result of traditional gender roles that have kept females from realizing their full potential.

In fact, prior to the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement, women's and girls' musical participation as drummers was frowned upon, and they were steered towards more "feminine" instruments, such as the flute, clarinet, or triangle (Foltz, 2003). They simply were not given the option of drumming, and, thus, many did not "discover" drumming until later in

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life, often as the result of having attended one of the many women's music festivals that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s around the country. Early on, two Midwestern festivals featured women drummers such as Layne Redmond, Edwinna Lee Tyler, and Ubaka Hill, well-known master drummers and teachers.² These women performed and held workshops at events where over 5,000 women were in attendance, exposing participants to a variety of drumming styles and teaching a significant portion to drum. As the sixties gave way to the 1970s, pagan festivals emerged around the country, and drumming around the bonfire became the "heartbeat" of the gathering, although most women danced while the men played the drums (Pike, 2001). During the 1970s, shamanism and "journey drumming" became popular among those who ascribed to the New Age (Harner, 1980), and in the 1980s, Robert Bly became a leading figure in the men's movement, offering drumming as a way for men to reclaim their true masculinity and to express their primal selves (Bly, 1992).

During this period, women who had been introduced to drumming at ongoing women's music festivals had gotten a taste of being "in the drummer's seat," so to speak, instead of dancing or sitting on the sidelines. Although these women persisted and were eventually successful at playing drums, theirs has not been an easy path, in large part due to gender role socialization. In the classic article, "Doing Gender," West and Zimmerman (1985) explore gendered conversational patterns, with particular emphasis on ways in which women are silenced when in the presence of men. Specifically, they note that men tend to usurp turn-taking rules in mixed groups and generally take control of conversations. This conversational theory parallels the dynamics between men and women when they drum together, as the women tend to be drowned out by the men. Another classic work, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, (Belenky, et. al., 1986), addresses the social hurdles that women face in a world steeped in the gendered message, 'girls/women are to be seen and not heard.' Concerns about prescribed gender role behavior are echoed by contemporary women as they consider the world of drumming. Those who do enter face gender-based challenges in drumming venues where they are often ignored, silenced by the men's loud drumming, or treated as sexual objects (Foltz, 2003). Once women feel "the call of the drum," however, most do not turn back. They confront these obstacles and start women-only drum circles in their own communities, and they take drumming lessons, often from male teachers, to become excellent players so their competence cannot be called into question. These women are the teachers and performers who are leading retreats today, the "foremothers" of contemporary women's drumming.

Clearly, American women have found their "place" as drummers, as indicated by the Internet, which offers a glimpse into the wide variety of drumming venues that are available to women. These include women's drum circles in secular and religious venues, such as the White Violet Center for Eco-Justice at St. Mary of the Woods College in St. Mary of the Woods,

² The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival near Hart, Michigan, has been operating for over 30 years; the National Women's Music Festival was hosted by Indiana University at Bloomington from the 1960s well into the 1990s when it relocated to the Ohio State University campus. The 2007 festival will take place on the campus of Illinois State University in Normal/Bloomington. Interviewees for a different study (Foltz, 2000) relate that these women's music festivals were created by and for lesbians, although they provide a space for all women to come together in community, and they showcase women musicians from around the world.

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Indiana and the Women's Drumming Circle of the First Unitarian Church in South Bend, Indiana. Both offer drum circles as a spiritual outlet, as does the Hartford Seminary in Pennsylvania. Drumming workshops, such as Sally Child-Helton's "Ladies Spring Fling" and "Women's Drum Weekend" at Oakwood Spiritual Retreat in central Indiana and drumming retreats, such as "Women's Drum Camp" in Ottawa, Canada, "The Happen'n" in upstate New York, and Helen Bond's bi-annual women's drumming retreat in Wisconsin provide additional experiences. Based on changing gender role prescriptions, the plethora of women's drum events posted on the Internet, and the electronic lists dedicated to women's drumming, as well as the increase in the drumming movement in general (Foltz, 2006), women's participation in drumming appears to have increased dramatically. Although this is significant in itself, what is more important, however, is that women are not "just" playing drums for their personal satisfaction; rather, they are also providing a service to a variety of community groups.

Research Methods

Drumming was a curiosity for the author long before it became a research project. In the summer of 1996, she attended a weekend workshop with frame drummer Layne Redmond and later joined djembe drummer Ubaka Hill and her *DrumSong Orchestra* at a women's music festival.³ Those workshops lead to her phenomenological understanding of what Csikzentmihaly (1990) calls "flow," the experience of being engrossed in an act to the point of not realizing how one is accomplishing it. There she found that group drumming produces a sense of boundary-less-ness and connection among participants. The social activity of drumming became a research project only after the author enrolled in Redmond's six-month intensive program, "Giving Birth to Ourselves," which relates drumming as a spiritual practice of empowerment lost to women since antiquity. Beyond Redmond's workshops, the settings for participant observation and interviews for the larger project of which this is just a portion, include a retreat with Ubaka Hill, a REMO HealthRHYTHMS™ training program, "The Happen'n," a women's drumming weekend, a Parkinson's World Congress meeting, and local drum circles in South Bend, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; and the author's home. In-depth face-to-face, phone, and e-mail interviews were conducted with thirty women who the author met at these and other venues. The women were selected as a result of their willingness to speak of their involvement with drumming in an audio-taped interview context for the author's research project. The Drum Circle Facilitators e-list, the Frame Drumming e-list, and the Drumming Women e-list served as additional sources of communication and data.

Drumming and Community Service

Drumming as a social phenomenon has only recently gained widespread attention in the popular press, with *The Economist* (2003) featuring an article on a drum circle facilitator, "Jeni," who the author interviewed for an earlier article on women's drumming (Foltz 2003). Although

³ A frame drum is hoop shaped, and the head is larger than the body. A djembe has an hour-glass, shape and the head is much smaller than the trunk of the drum. Frame drums tend to have a softer tone and are often used for trance and ritual, while the djembe is louder and deeper.

studies on drumming are accumulating⁴ and drumming is gaining a presence in after-school programs, college music programs, and health care and religious institutions, many are not familiar with its applications. Although hundreds of women and men are using their drumming to provide unique services to their communities, this paper highlights the work of six women. The women are Layne Redmond, who recently relocated to Brazil from Florida, Ubaka Hill of New York, Christine Stevens of Los Angeles, Heather MacTavish of the Bay Area, Fre Atlast of Woodstock, New York and Connecticut, and Helen Bond of Chicago. Each woman provides a distinctive type of community service through her drumming. These six were chosen not only because they are using their drumming in distinguishing ways, but because they are pioneers in several areas, including women's drumming, giving the oppressed a voice, drumming for health, drumming with physically- and cognitively-challenged populations, drumming with elders, and drumming with women and girl survivors of trauma. As such, these women drummers represent role models in the wider drumming community, and they characterize the tremendous diversity of ways in which drumming expertise can be used as a form of social action at and beyond the local level. Readers should understand that although some drummers take a spiritual approach to their drumming, most group drumming is secular in nature and geared to achieve relatively mundane purposes, such as bringing people together in community.

The Women

Layne Redmond is a frame drummer who wrote a pivotal book for women drummers, *When the Drummers were Women: A Spiritual History of Rhythm* (Redmond, 1997). Her research examines temple friezes and hundreds of artifacts found in museums in the Middle East, Egypt, and the Mediterranean, and from these she theorizes that women held important positions as court musicians or musician temple priestesses during antiquity. Because percussion instruments were thought to have spiritual power and the ability to transform consciousness and reality, she posits that women used their position as drummers for oracular communication with divine entities. She suggests that when monotheistic religious leaders no longer allowed women to play music in these roles, women began to lose their influence and standing in the community. Redmond views drumming as an important resource that contemporary women can use to "reclaim their voices" and, thus, their power. Her classes are designed to introduce frame drumming as it has been used historically in cultures around the world, to teach technical proficiency on the Egyptian tar, riq, and tambourine, and to give students an understanding of drumming as a spiritual practice.⁵

Redmond is a pioneer in the field who has influenced people around the world to take up the drum, as evidenced by my questionnaire and interview data. For instance, a Japanese woman related that reading Redmond's book inspired her to drum again after having experienced a profound family tragedy that had brought her musical activities to a halt. In over 100 completed

⁴ Research studies on drumming are limited but growing: several Ph.D. candidates in Music Therapy, Psychology, and Anthropology have written dissertations about drumming, and neurologist Barry Bittman, M.D., has co-authored research on drumming and its effects on health (Bittman, et. al, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005).

⁵ Pictures of Redmond's signature tar, riq, tar-rine, and tambourine are available at www.layneredmond.com/series.

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questionnaires, as well as 30 in-depth interviews and innumerable real-time and cyber conversations, about 75% cite Redmond's work as having had a positive influence on their perspective about drumming as well as their decision to take up drumming.⁶ In addition to being the first woman to produce "signature drums" for REMO, the world's largest drum manufacturer, Redmond teaches workshops, performs, and records CDs and videos.⁷ Over the past decade, she has led journeys to Egypt, Greece, and Brazil where participants learn traditional drumming of the region and learn about regional goddesses and Orishas⁸. She uses a portion of the proceeds to donate her drums to a music school in the depressed area of Candéal (Bahia, Brazil) and to teach disadvantaged children frame drumming for months at a time at no cost to them.

Lesser known than Layne Redmond, Ubaka Hill, a drummer for over thirty years, has her own following. She perceives drumming as a tool of empowerment, especially for oppressed groups whose voices are not generally heard. Hill feels that drumming instills a sense of confidence and competence that can ultimately lead to personal and social change. A deeply spiritual person, Hill understands drumming as a way to "honor the ancestors," to "tune into" one's natural rhythms, and to connect with others. During her retreats, she teaches basic drum strokes, rhythm patterns, and drum repair, and "free form" drum circles develop every evening. On the final night, she holds a "healing circle" where drummers, singers, and dancers gather to "send their healing intentions" to those who desire them. The healing circle is a staple in her drum retreat repertoire.

Hill and two colleagues co-produce "The Happen'n," an annual drumming retreat for women and girls in the Catskill Mountains.⁹ There participants can learn to play Japanese Taiko drums, Native American and Middle Eastern frame drums, the West African djembe, doun doun (a base drum) and the Gyle (a wood and gourd keyboard), shekeres (a large beaded gourd shaker) and bells, and the Brazilian berimbau, as well as learn traditional dances of these cultures. In 2006 the event attracted 175 women and girl drummers, both amateurs and experts, ranging in age from twelve years into the seventies. Although most participants did not know each other at the outset of the weekend, camaraderie developed during workshops, meals, and performances. At the closing circle, all held hands and sang a farewell song, which, judging from the tears on the women's faces, was deeply moving. This scene might be interpreted as evidence of the bonding and community created through playing drums together.

⁶ The questionnaires were distributed at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Ubaka Hill's workshops, and Layne Redmond's workshops in 2000-2001 as well as on the Web.

⁷ Redmond teaches introductory and advanced frame drum workshops, as well as "Ancient Bee Priestess" and "Giving Birth To Ourselves" intensive drumming workshops. She performs on the East and West Coasts of the United States, as well as in Brazil and Crete. Her CDs include "Roots of Awakening," "Chakra Breathing Meditations," "Heart Chakra Meditation," "Invoking the Muse," "Trance Union" (with Tommy Brunjes), and "Being in Rhythm." Her videotapes include "Ritual Drumming" and "Rhythmic Wisdom" (see www.layneredmond.com).

⁸ Orixas (aka "Orishas") are spirits in the Brazilian Candomble religion, similar to the Lucumi religion in Cuba and Yoruba religion in Africa.

⁹ For information on co-producers Leaf Miller and Fre Atlast, see www.drumcentral.net

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Hill edits and publishes *Drumsong/Drumming Womyn's News*, and she performs, conducts workshops, and provides resources for the drumming community. In addition, she works hard to produce CDs, such as "Shape Shifter," "Dance the Spiral Dance," and her most recent, "Beyond the Wind." Hill's Drum Song Institute archives the emerging drumming traditions of women in the United States. Hill co-sponsors the *Estrojam Music and Culture Festival*, whose mission, according to the website, is "to help foster a supportive art community that inspires, educates, breaks down stereotypes and encourages bold creative expression."¹⁰ The website claims that this festival is geared towards empowering girls and women belonging to marginalized groups so that they may "claim their voices and celebrate their own unique forms of self expression," using the arts as a tool for social change.

Another "mover and shaker" in the drumming world is Christine Stevens, who has Master's degrees in social work and music therapy. Stevens is a voice-trained musician, pianist, saxophonist, and guitarist. During a phone interview, Stevens revealed that she was first introduced to drumming in a mental health setting where frame drums were used to help clients manage their aggressive impulses.¹¹ After attending a drum circle facilitation workshop at the National Music Therapy Conference in 1992, she learned how to "facilitate" or guide rhythm-based groups so they could reach their highest musical potential. As a result, she took up drumming and began to host community "fun" drum circles. In 1994 Stevens was scheduled to lead a circle at the Special Olympics World Games, and she approached Remo Belli, owner of REMO, Inc., for a contribution. Mr. Belli donated fifty drums to the cause and years later signed her as an artist and an official endorsee. Stevens served as a REMO wellness consultant while completing her Master's in music therapy (1998). She later met neurologist Barry Bittman, M.D. and Karl Bruhn,¹² former president of the American Music Conference, and together they developed what has become REMO's *HealthRHYTHMS™ Group Empowerment Drumming*, a wellness program designed for health care settings. Stevens has collaborated on research that shows a drumming protocol reduces "burnout" in long-term care workers (Bittman, Bruhn, Stevens, Westengard, and Umbach, 2003) and it reduces burnout and improves mood states in nursing students (Bittman, Snyder, Bruhn, Liebfried, Stevens, Westengard, and Umbach, 2004).

Over the past six years, Stevens has been invited to facilitate drum circles after major disasters, including the site of the Littleton, Colorado school shootings as well as the site of the World Trade Center attack, a year later. In 2006, she made two trips to New Orleans to conduct drum circles with Hurricane Katrina survivors living in FEMA trailers and with crisis workers who are experiencing "serious burnout." Stevens asserts that the drum is "transformational" as it "takes people from where they are to where they want to be," and it helps them move beyond self-imposed limitations. She states that drumming can become a "tool for creative empowerment" because it creates "an open atmosphere where change can happen."

Stevens has created her life's work around drumming. Her business, *Upbeat Drum Circles*, offers a variety of programs including community "fun" drum circles, a corporate team

¹⁰ For information about the Estrojam festival, see www.estrojam.org/2006/about.html.

¹¹ The interview took place on January 9, 2006.

¹² Bruhn has been associated with the National Association of Music Merchants, the National Piano Foundation, and is Presidential Advisor to the American Music Therapy Association.

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building program, and *D-Village*TM, a non-threatening diversity training program that uses percussion instruments to represent different social groups.¹³ On a lighter note, Stevens led the Rose Bowl Parade with a giant gong on New Year's Day in 2005 and 2006. She has written two books, *The Art and Heart of Drum Circles* (2003) and *The Healing Drum Kit* (2005), a combination drum, book, and CD package sold in health food stores as well as bookstores.

Adding a unique dimension to the world of drum circle facilitation and health, Heather MacTavish has a story that must be told. Having contracted Parkinson's disease in 1995, she moved to Marin County where she participated in her first drumming circle. MacTavish soon discovered that drumming not only helped her physical condition, but it also lifted her spirits. She decided to learn to facilitate drum circles, and after doing so, formed the *New Rhythms Foundation*, which offers "drum-story-song"TM circles to people who have physical and/or cognitive challenges. MacTavish's program integrates simple stories that lead to singing well-known songs that, in turn, invite participants to play their drums. She works with "well elders," people in assisted living and long-term care facilities, intergenerational programs, and special populations such as those with Alzheimer's disease or autism.¹⁴ In early 2006, MacTavish invited the author, among others, to assist her at the World Parkinson Congress in Washington, D.C. Parkinson's patients and researchers from around the world were in attendance; thus, symptoms of Parkinson's disease could be observed before, during, and after the many music-making activities that were offered. The visible changes among some patients were profound. For instance, in one drum circle, an older man who sat rigid in his wheelchair and who could not walk or talk was presented with a drum and beater, and he became the rhythmic showcase of the circle with his drumming. When his caretaker wheeled him out of the room, he was beaming, although he could not speak. As a Parkinson's patient herself, MacTavish's musical work through her foundation gives much-needed hope to those with mobility challenges.¹⁵

Similar to the women already introduced, Fre Atlast has a vision that she has brought to fruition. A teacher, drummer, songwriter, and guitar player, she lives her dream by facilitating drum circles with a variety of groups. She plays with 18-month old babies and their mothers, as well as teenagers and elders in community settings such as schools, nursing homes, and the local women's spa. She works with a nonviolence interfaith project and co-produces "The Happen'n." Atlast is co-founder of the "Elders Drum Project," an effort to improve elders' quality of life in nursing homes.¹⁶ According to Fleming Cotrell and Gallant (2003) who reported on this project, the elders experienced positive changes that include gaining a sense of purpose and meaning, feeling needed and a part of the group, being in control, creative, and simply enjoying music making. They found that not only does drumming give the elders something to do, but it also

¹³ Each musical timbre group – such as woods, bells, shakers, high drums and low drums—symbolizes different racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual orientation groups in society. For three years, her program was featured at NCORE, the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education. For more information about her programs, see www.upbeatdrumcircles.com.

¹⁴ MacTavish is cited in Robert Friedman, *The Healing Power of the Drum*, White Cliffs Media: Reno, NV, 2000.

¹⁵ For information on MacTavish's program, see www.newrhythms.org.

¹⁶ The project began in 1998 in an Occupational Therapy department in a nursing home in rural New York.

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stimulates their minds and bodies, helps them maintain functionality, and decreases their isolation and sense of loneliness. This documentation of the elders' actions and words about the benefits of the drum project has led to an understanding of strategies that can help people thrive in such institutional settings. The wisdom gained from the elders inspired Atlas's new vision—that of creating an “alternative model community.” Her collaborative Project ALILAC (Assisted Living/ Independent Living Arts Community) is billed as “a way to provide our esteemed relatives and friends a place to live with dignity and the ability to be creative and productive as they get older.”¹⁷ The goal is to create a model multi-generational arts community that will benefit both the elders and the community and will be replicated in other parts of the country, and she is currently working on the first phase of this project (see Diffendal, 2006).

Clearly, the common thread among these women drummers is a commitment to drumming and service to others. Helen Bond is no exception. A percussionist, educator and storyteller, Bond has a drum business, *Medusa's Musical Mysteries*, and she works with youth groups. She also works with sexually abused girls and battered women and employs drumming as a vehicle for survivors to confront their experiences and convey feelings about issues that are difficult to voice. Thus, Bond focuses on healing through energizing human creativity, which “works” for traumatized populations. She also studies with West African master drummer Famadou Konate. Over the past five years Bond has traveled to Guinea, West Africa, where she lives in the village of Sangbaralla for several months learning traditional Malinke music, songs, and dances. She has been exposed to Malinke cultural beliefs as well as the challenges these people face. Her percussion group, *Diamana Diya* promotes the “Benkadi Project,” a fundraising effort to expand educational opportunities for Malinke children as well as medical provisions for their village.¹⁸ Proceeds from their performances are directed to the project to improve and expand the educational facility, provide needed materials, and pay teachers' salaries as well as improve medical services, supplies, and physical resources available to the village.

In sum, the vision and the community service provided by these women through group music making has an extensive, if not yet measured, impact on people's lives. Their contributions have been many, as they have shared their lives and drumming skills with women and men in a variety of settings. Layne Redmond's momentous book encourages women to reclaim their voices and, thus, their power through drumming. Her spiritually-based drum workshops and journeys to Brazil, Crete, and Egypt not only teach her students about ancient and modern drumming practices, but also fund her musical work with disadvantaged children in Brazil. Ubaka Hill's focus on the marginalized and oppressed is aimed at giving disenfranchised groups a voice and allowing them to be heard. Her annual drum retreat brings together a richly diverse group of women and girls who actively engage in multi-cultural drumming, dancing, and performance.¹⁹ Christine Stevens is using her music therapy and social work skills to bring fun and a sense of control to those who have endured disasters, such as school shootings, terrorist

¹⁷ See www.eldersdrumproject.org//ALILAC.htm.

¹⁸ “Diamana Diya” is a name given to the group by Famadou Konate. It means “Make good music for the land,” symbolizing the group's efforts to help his people. For more information, see www.medusadrums.com/kia.htm.

¹⁹ The diversity in age, social class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of participants is wide ranging.

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attacks, and hurricanes. Her work with Health RHYTHMS™ is impacting health care organizations and her business, and Upbeat Drum Circles™, is reaching many through its provision of diversity training, corporate teambuilding, and community drum circles. Heather MacTavish, who has Parkinson's disease, is considered an inspiration by others who have the disease, as well as by her drum circle facilitator peers. Her work with "drum-story-telling"™ is reaching a growing number of people who have cognitive and/or mobility challenges. The community work of Fre Atlant touches people of all ages, from babies, to teens, to mothers, and the elderly. Her nursing home work with the "Elders Drum Project" has proven invaluable to elders' state of mind, their feeling of belonging, creativity, and their functionality. She is currently co-creating her vision of a model "intergenerational, independent living arts community" with her partner. And finally, Helen Bond and her company, Medusa's Musical Mysteries™, offers girls and women an alternative way of communicating about trauma through drumming. She sponsors women's drum retreats and works with youth as well as with a West African drumming master. Her performance group, Diamana Diya, donates their earnings to the Bekadi project to help people in W. Africa procure educational and medical supplies. It is clear that these women are using their drumming knowledge to help those in their own communities and well beyond.

Regional Women and Drumming

Most of the women's drumming data comes from regions other than Northwest Indiana, and, thus, an attempt was made to locate regional women's drumming groups. The author easily found two groups via the Internet, one in South Bend and the other in Chicago, and both have a spiritual as well as community focus.²⁰ The third drum group was a women's drumming class in Chicago.

The South Bend-based "Drumming Women" group grew out of their membership in the Unitarian Church. Although they first met to learn drumming rhythms and practice their spirituality, they soon began performing and making CDs to raise funds for community projects. The group meets on every full moon when they gather to play rhythms and sing in an outdoor setting (weather permitting), catch up on one another's lives, and share a potluck dinner. Core members have been meeting for at least five years, and they use the language of sisterhood when talking about the experience of drumming together.

One woman, a performer in a mixed gender drum group, teaches drumming to recovering alcoholic women at a local community center. She claims that drumming instills a sense of competence that helps the women believe in themselves, and this in turn gives them the confidence that they are capable of accomplishing their goals beyond the area of drumming.²¹ She holds private drum classes and workshops and serves as the group's resource for new

²⁰ It must be emphasized that *facilitated* drum circles are secular, that is, they are not associated with a religious perspective and are designed to simply offer participants a "good time" of music making. However, drum circles that do not have a facilitator tend to develop in accordance with the wishes and direction of the group.

²¹ Foltz (2000) found this to be true with recovering women alcoholics who were practitioners of Goddess spirituality as well as drummers.

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rhythms. Another woman inspired the group to make a CD in order to raise funds so that people in Belize can have a clean water supply. Other causes include local and global environmentalism, women's issues, and peace projects. Several women in this group volunteer annually to play drums in the local production of "The Vagina Monologues," a fundraiser for abused women. They organize a fall camp for women and girls, and they regularly send several key people, including a professor, to a Midwestern women's spirituality conference to further their activist goals and visibility.

Another group, the Chicago based "She Drums," regularly posts mytho-poetic electronic invitations to women to participate in seasonal celebrations and goddess spirituality. The founder, "Hazel," organizes and performs in drum/dance activities to raise funds for local health food stores, yoga groups, and arts groups. She also sponsors ritual gatherings and performances at the Unity Church on Chicago's north side. A recent electronic missive invites women to "face your fears and dance through them," with the notation "bring your drums and shakers, rattles and music makers," while the signature on the flyer says "rooted, connected, transformed." The group welcomes women and girls with any level of drumming experience, and percussion is provided. Once a month this group merges with a mixed gender drum circle to form the "We-Drum Tribe," when they celebrate the seasons in an outdoor drum circle near Northwestern University.

Until last year, when she moved to California, a Chicago drum teacher and performer, "Jeni," facilitated weekend drum circles at "Rhythm," a club with a drumming focus. She taught a group called "Rhythm Sisters," that met and performed, on occasion, at the club. Jeni worked with teenaged girls in group homes and used drumming to make math exciting to her students. As an artist, she made arts projects visible through her drumming and often performed in a variety of venues. Although the Chicago group has dissipated since she relocated, she now teaches a women's empowerment drumming group in the Bay Area.

Beyond these three ongoing drumming venues for women, other regional groups have been difficult to find. Therefore, the author decided to conduct an experiment involving a women's drum circle. Having attended a HealthRHYTHMS™ weekend in June 2004, where participants learned about research on drumming and healing (see Bittman, et al., 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, among others) and studied how to design a rhythm circle, I took REMO's "challenge" to host a drum event. Following their protocol, flyers advertised a "women's fun and relaxation" circle. Community women in their forties and fifties, representing a variety of backgrounds in social class, occupation, religious affiliation, race, and ethnicity were invited. Follow-up phone calls clarified that the intent of the drum circle was to try something that might be used with troubled teens. Thirteen women showed up on a hot, humid Thursday evening in July, during a torrential rainstorm. After two hours of drumming, the women indicated in an evaluation questionnaire that they learned several things. They discovered they "have rhythm" and can play drums; they felt considerably more relaxed at the end of the session than the beginning; and they felt a sense of bonding with the others, even though many had not met each other before. The overwhelming consensus was that they enjoyed the drumming and felt that a drum circle would be an excellent activity to employ with teenagers, troubled or not.

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Conclusion

Although some might not understand the benefits of recreational music making for women, this research has given insight into the potential of drumming as a vehicle for personal and social change (see also, Foltz, 2006). From these six stories, as well as regional efforts, it is clear that drumming is a tool that can elicit women's potential by enabling them to experience at least three important things. First, in contrast to being silenced at work, home, or in religious settings, drumming beckons women to be heard, to be creative, and to reclaim their voices. The ability to express one's self is essential in gaining a strong sense of identity and a sense of self, distinct from one's family or love relationships. It is also essential for being a full participant in the community. Second, the drum can serve as a healing tool in a broad sense. It aids in linking the mind with the body and connecting people to each other (Redmond, 1997). It can serve as a medium to communicate hidden traumas where women can "drum through" their fears in the safety and support of a women's circle and emerge firmly grounded and strong. And third, the sheer joy of drumming and the sense of bonding it engenders may inspire women to help others reach out, get involved, and live up to their full potential. The friendship and camaraderie, the feeling of community in a relaxed setting, and the healing aspects of group drumming create a condition where one can personally grow and thrive, as well as support the development of others.

In summary, drumming has a multitude of community-based uses. Women are employing drumming to teach others to drum, to help oppressed groups find their voices, to deal with traumatic situations, and in many cases, to heal. They provide assistance to special populations, such as those who have endured the loss of family and home, the physically and sexually abused, and those with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, creating a growing awareness of the benefits of drumming (Clair, Bernstein and Johnson, 1995). Group drumming provides community, dignity, and creativity for troubled teens as well as for the abandoned and the elderly; and it can promote peace in a war-torn world.²² In short, drumming has arrived. It is no longer an activity engaged in by a few "weirdos" or guys in rock bands, but rather it has become a tool that anyone can employ to bring people together in creative music making, and contribute to their communities in a meaningful way.

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²² See www.drummingforpeace.org .

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