

The Drum as Instrument and Tool

By Bill Scheidt, Director, TTM Winston Salem
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Two approaches to drumming

At first glance it seems that in today's culture group drumming is approached in two ways. One approach emphasizes the use of the drum as a traditional instrument, focusing on the art form of drumming as expressed through the study of rhythms from traditional cultures. The other approach emphasizes the use of the drum as a tool for wellness and self-expression, focusing not on creating musical outcomes but on creating health or behavioral outcomes. Both of these time tested approaches have much to offer. It is my philosophy to synthesize both approaches. We bring together the most powerful and effective elements of each approach to create a natural and accessible experience of the drum as instrument and tool.

What's it all about?

To some, it may seem that the two general approaches to group drumming in our society are contradictory opposites. According to the school of thought that approaches the drum as a traditional instrument, drumming is a journey of mastery and expression in an ancient art form. It's about growth and development as a musician, and the preservation of tradition. It's about exploring complex patterns in time and space. It's about learning and challenge. According to the school of thought that approaches drumming as a tool, it's not about the quality of the music; it's about the quality of the human experience. It's not about performance or tradition, it's about self-expression. It's not about getting it right; it's about getting connected. It's not learning about rhythm, it's learning

about one's self.

The debate

There is often great debate in the world of drumming over which of these approaches is best, which is right, which is most authentic, which is of better service to the individual and humanity. I suggest a shift in paradigm. I suggest that rather than looking to see which is better, look to see the benefit and strength in each. I suggest that these two approaches are not contradictory opposites, but complementary opposites. Each has its strengths and its shortcomings, but they are not mutually exclusive.

The drum as instrument

There is an incredible depth and richness to the art of drumming in traditional cultures. In fact, when one looks deeply enough, it becomes apparent that there is as much development and complexity in traditional drumming as there is in classical music or jazz. However, in our culture, there is also a pervasive myth that only a special few have talent or rhythm, and that the rest of us are doomed to the embarrassing outcome of never getting it right. This manifests as a major barrier to musical expression for the common person, and can be the cause of substantial stress in the beginning drummer. If compounded by an experience with a rigid or forceful teacher, this could be enough to squelch people's natural expression and to turn them away from drumming for life.

The drum as tool

There is great power in using the drum as a tool for health and wellness. In fact, for the first time in the history of medical science, there is irrefutable, hard-core scientific data substantiating the medical benefits of drumming. Its ability as a vehicle for facilitating human potential is inspiring and transformational. However, many of the protocols used in this approach are designed for maximum public accessibility with a short-term exposure to

drumming. This means that there is often an omission of the richness of traditional drumming on the grounds that the possible stress of learning would inhibit health and expression. But, without the infusion of musical tradition, there is little structure for expanding the scope of the beginner's natural creativity, and there is little support for sustaining a long-term growth relationship with the instrument. For some, drumming could become a monotony of formless jams from which they eventually wander away. Not to mention that teaching the rhythms of drumming cultures keeps those cultures alive, and is a service to those who have gone before us, to whom we owe our thanks for the development of the instrument and art form.

A New Paradigm

I suggest that the most effective results are created when the strongest elements of both approaches are combined. It is my goal to create a natural and accessible experience of drumming that engenders immediate success and expression with the traditional art form of the instrument, and fosters the growth of a long term relationship with the drum as an everyday tool for joy, health, and community. It is my goal to create an experience of drumming that is powerful, musical, traditional, expressive, accessible, and joyful.