

ARTICLE LIBRARY

Why Drums and Drum Circles?

by Karl T. Bruhn

Humans have the need to belong, to be part of a group of individuals who share interests, and who come together for a common purpose. Such needs are as important to children and teens as they are to people in mid-life and to senior adults. In fact, it is increasingly being understood that this need for connection with others may be the most important component contributing to quality of life.

The Music Making and Wellness Project

Dr. Frederick Tims, principal investigator for the Music Making and Wellness Research Project and professor and chair of Music Therapy at Michigan State University says, "We feel strongly that abundant health benefits can be achieved by older adults who learn to make music in a supportive, socially enjoyable setting." A well known case in point is the New Horizons band started by Dr. Roy Ernst, Chairman of the Department of Music Education at the renowned Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Dr. Ernst formed a band comprised largely of adults between the ages of 60 to 85, the majority of who never had previous music lessons. With instruction and encouragement, the New Horizons Band achieved excellence in performance, not to mention the great pleasure and happiness afforded both its members and audiences.

The research is clear!

Adults can benefit significantly - in many ways - when they learn to make their own music in a supportive, socially enjoyable setting. Writing in *MUSICIA*, Research Notes, Dr. Norman M. Weinberger, Center for the Neurobiology of Learning & Memory, University of California at Irvine, is quick to point out that it is "never too late" for music. He goes on to say, "It is an established fact that the adult brain is perfectly capable of learning and remembering music throughout life span."

Ramifications for the percussion industry

In 1994 Remo Belli, Founder and President of REMO, Inc. wrote, "By a wide margin, the fastest growing segment of the population consists of people over 50 and most of them are not looking for the same things that traditional percussion customers are. Generally speaking, they aren't looking to become skilled performers but rather, they're looking for a creative and rewarding social experience - a chance to bond with others, an opportunity for self-expression or to relax, or do something "healthy" for themselves."

Why Drums, Drumming and Drum Circles?

We are drawn to drums. They are like a magnet and few can pass a drum without touching it. But, more than that, people with little or no musical background can participate in group percussion activities. And drumming events can bring the

ARTICLE LIBRARY

benefits of drumming to a broad segment of the population and these experiences tend to be enjoyable and positive for all involved. Participation in such events promotes relaxation, communication, and a sense of belonging to the community. In her 1994 think DRUMS article, Barbara J. Crowe, RMT-BC pointed out that drum circle activities are based on several basic principles:

- Response to rhythm is basic to human functioning making percussion activities and techniques highly motivating to people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Pure percussion activities are interesting and enjoyable to all people regardless of ethnic and cultural background, musical preferences, or age range making these activities useful in creating groups that are fun and positive for a wide variety of people.
- Participation in active group percussion experiences has physical benefits including sustained physical activity, relaxation, and use of fine motor skills.
- A strong sense of group identity and a feeling of belonging is created because participants are actively making music together and because the sustained repetition of the steady beat acts to bring people together physically, emotionally, and mentally (rhythmic entrainment).
- Percussion activities can be done with little or no previous musical background or training making these experiences accessible to virtually all people.

Karl Bruhn, now retired, serves as a member of the HealthRhythms team and is the Presidential Advisor to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA). Karl has also served as the coordinator for the Music Making and Wellness Project. He is a member of the board of Directors of REMO, Inc., and continues to be active in the music products industry.

NOTE: For more information about the New Horizons Band, the Music Making and Wellness Project and Music-Brain research, contact the [American Music Conference](#) at 800/767-6266.