

Afrikaya Drum Circles

Afrikaya drum circles are a combination of community circles, facilitated circles, and teaching of West African rhythms. Everyone is welcome whatever their age or ability. The aim always is to have fun!

It's 22 years since Geoff and Di started Kaya drums workshops! Their son, Alex, took over the 'business' a number of years ago [working in the community, schools, hospitals, institutions, and so on - go to [Kaya Rhythm and Arts](#), freeing Geoff up to pursue his career as a psychotherapist and Di to run the charity [with the help of Geoff, Helen and Sanjeen]. Geoff and Di continue to run community drum circles a twice a month in Wiltshire. It is as a result of their love of African drumming that Geoff and Di first went to The Gambia 17 years ago to improve their djembe skills. The rest - as they say - is history.

Community drum circles are informal gatherings of people who meet for the purpose of playing drums together. Instrumentation centres around drums and percussion, but may include other instruments, such as flutes, didgeridoos, and other non-percussion instruments. Practically anything that can be banged on to make noise can be used as a percussion instrument such as cans, buckets, pipes, etc. Community drum circles differ from facilitated drum circles in that the music is entirely improvised through a process of group interaction. Participation is voluntary and often includes drumming, singing or chanting, dancing, and listening. Community drum circles often attract both regular and drop-in participants of all ages and can take place just about anywhere. Community drum circles are the original and most popular form of improvised community drumming.

A "facilitated" drum circle is a form of group drumming in which a person seeks to focus the intent and improve the quality and effect of the activity, making it easier for people to effectively participate by taking a more directive approach. The facilitator is constantly monitoring the music in the group, and generally being encouraging and accepting of participant ideas. In this way, the facilitator takes on a role similar to that of a music teacher or drumming instructor whose goal it is to empower the participants and encourage them to share their ideas. At the beginning the facilitator directs the music through verbal and non-verbal cuing. Cues, which often mirror the movements of an orchestral conductor, are directed at the participants, who respond to the leader. This creates a leader/follower dynamic between the facilitator and participants. Actions such as rolling (rumbling), starting, stopping, raising/lowering the volume, accents, and when to play/not play are often given by the facilitator. Conducting is not normally part of a traditional (community) drum circle, and therefore makes this type of circle a unique experience and very different from a community circle.

"When you take your drum to a rhythm circle and play it with your community, healing happens. It does not matter if the group's focus is purely social or ritualistic. If you come and drum, the healing is compounded because everyone is putting their spirit into their drum, and their hearts are open. You get and give a rhythmical massage that is compounded by the number of

people in the circle and the energy they are sharing with each other."

~ *Arthur Hull*

West African Rhythms. Taught to us by master drummers of the Susu tribe from Guinea Conacky on our visits to The Gambia. We pass on to you some of the simpler rhythms that we have been taught. The aim is always to have fun.

There are many different styles of **djembe rhythm**. These difference come down to geographical location, and hence different ethnic groups and the evolution of cultural practices in disparate locations and different ethnic groups, such as Maninka, Susu and Bamana. A 'djembe style' is not something that's easy to define, in part because styles are continually evolving.

A high level breakdown of the 'djembe rhythm' styles might look something like this:

- Susu style
- Maninka style (with two or three dunduns)
- Bamana style (or "Bamako style with Kassonka influences")
- Ballet style

The term "djembe" originates from the Bambara saying: "Anke djé, anke bé" ---- "everyone gather together in peace."

The djembe is said to consist of three spirits: the spirit of the tree from which it was made, the spirit of the animal whose skin covers the head, and the spirit of the drum maker."