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Experience and Enjoy Therapeutic West African Drumming

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Therapeutic West African Drumming

How an Ancient Tradition Remedies a
Modern Problem: Youth-At-Risk

Characteristics of Youth At Risk

- • Chronic poverty
- • Single parent (Stress, excessive work load, long hours, depression, lack of social support, etc.)
- • Poor parenting skills (family discord, negative role models, lack of structure and rules, etc.),
- • Large family
- • Poor schools
- • Bad grades
- • Bad neighborhoods (drugs, lack of things to do, lack of community support, violence, etc.),
- • Negative peer influence
- • Minority status
- • Low birth weight
- • Drug use by self or caregiver
- • Poor social skills

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Youth At Risk

What works?

- Caring sustained relationships
- Reachable goals
- Realistic Hopeful Pathways
- Engaging School and Community Settings
- <http://www.edutopia.org/strategies-help-at-risk-students>

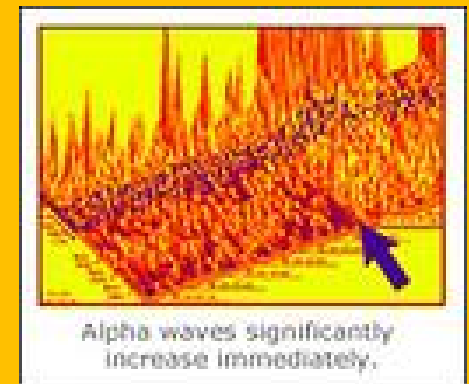
Why Drumming?

- “When we are drumming together, everyone is speaking through his or her drum and listening to the drums at the same time...intertwining rhythms in which everyone is speaking, everyone is heard, and each person’s is an essential part of the whole.”
- Michael Winkelman, PhD, MPH states: “
- Research reviews indicate that drumming enhances recovery through inducing relaxation and enhancing theta-wave production and brain-wave synchronization.

Why Drumming? Cont'd

- Drumming produces pleasurable experiences, enhanced awareness of preconscious dynamics, release of emotional trauma, and reintegration of self.
- Drumming alleviates self-centeredness, isolation, and alienation, creating a sense of connectedness with self and others.
- Drumming provides a secular approach to accessing a higher power and applying spiritual perspectives.”

Modern research can also show us exactly how our brain waves are affected by rhythm and drumming. The research has shown that the drumbeat alters brainwave patterns, increasing Alpha (a light meditative brainwave), and dramatically reducing stress. Through the rhythmic repetition of sounds, the body, brain and the nervous system are energized and transformed. When a group of people play a rhythm for an extended period of time, their brain waves become entrained to the rhythm and they have a shared brain wave state. The longer the drumming goes on, the more powerful the entrainment becomes.

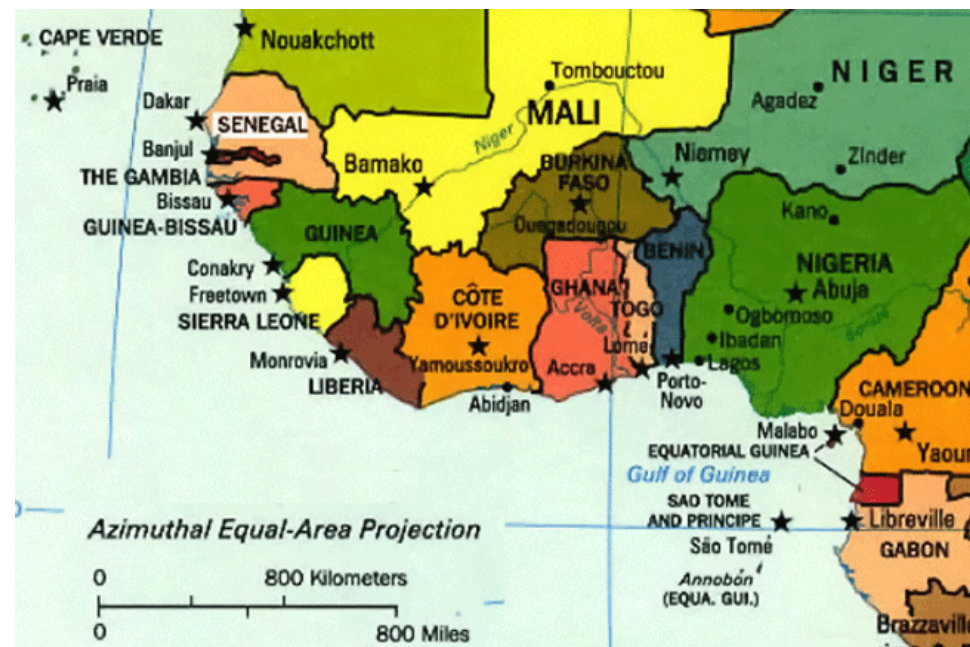


What We've Seen

- Drumming reaches many types of clients. Hyper children are calmed; Lethargic ones gain energy.
- Concentration increases and lasts for hours after a drumming session.
- Behaviors tend to be more stable.
- Emotions are managed better. Many students state that drumming helps them with anger.
- Students achieve goals, gain confidence and self-esteem.

History of West African Drumming

- Geographically, the traditional distribution of the djembe is associated with the Mali Empire, which dates back to 1230 AD and included parts of the modern-day countries of Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, and Senegal.



- It seems likely that the history of the djembe reaches back for at least several centuries, and possibly more than a millennium.
- The name of the djembe translates to "everyone gather together in peace" and defines the drum's purpose. In the Bambara language, "djé" is the verb for "gather" and "bé" translates as "peace."
- The Malinké people of West Africa say that a skilled drummer is one who can make the djembe "talk", meaning that the player can tell an emotional story. (The Malinké never used the djembe as a signaling drum.)

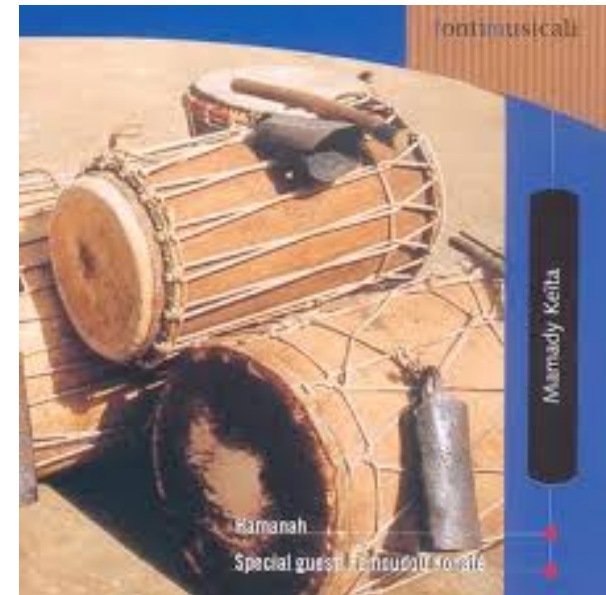
➤The **djembe** first came to the attention of audiences outside West Africa with the efforts of Fodéba Keïta of Guinea, who, in 1952, founded Les Ballets Africains. The ballet toured extensively in Europe and was declared Guinea's first national ballet by Guinea's first president, Sékou Touré, after Guinea gained independence in 1958.

➤After the death of Sekou Touré in 1984, funding for the ballets dried up and a number of djembefolas (master performers who were never paid well by the ballets) emigrated and made regular teaching and performance appearances in the west, including Mamady Keïta (Belgium, US)

➤The 1991 documentary *Djembefola* by Laurent Chevallier depicts Mamady Keïta's return to the village of his birth after a 26-year absence. Upon release, the movie won several prominent film awards and brought the djembe to the attention of a wide international audience.



➤ In Guinea, a typical drum ensemble uses three djembes and three **dundun** (cylindrical shaped drums, usually propped up on stands or chairs), called *sangban* (medium pitch), *dundunba* (bass pitch), and *kenkeni* (high pitch). If an ensemble includes more than one djembe, the highest pitched (and therefore loudest) djembe plays solo phrases and the other djembes and dunun play accompaniment.

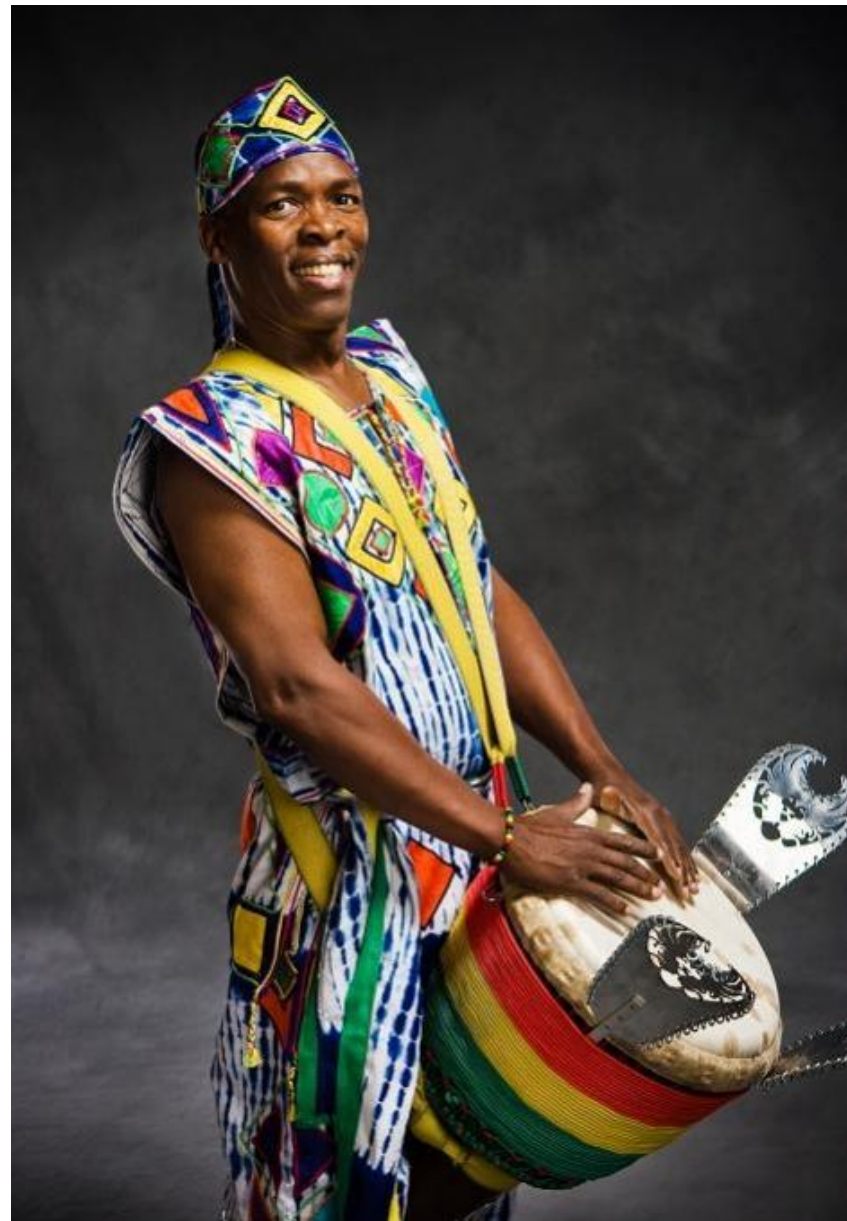


➤ A djembe and dundun ensemble traditionally does not play music for people to simply sit back and listen to. Instead, the ensemble creates rhythm for people to dance, sing, clap, or work to. The western distinction between musicians and audience is inappropriate in a traditional context.

➤ On a djembe tuned to solo pitch, skilled players can achieve sound pressure of more than 105 dB, about the same volume as a jackhammer.

➤ A rhythm is rarely played as a performance, but is participatory: musicians, dancers, singers, and onlookers are all part of the ensemble and frequently change roles while the music is in progress. Musicians and participants often form a circle, with the centre of the circle reserved for dancers.

- Currently there is a vast, diverse network of people all over the world who study and play the djembe.
- We are at the end of a line of teachers and students that stretches back over 1000 years. This provides a richness, efficacy and power not typically found in free-form drum circles.
- The school or lineage we have chosen to study and implement in our Youth Villages program is one established primarily by **Mamady Keita**, an initiated master from Guinea, West Africa; one of a handful in the world.



- Mamady established the **Tam Tam Mendingue** school over 20 years ago in Belgium to teach djembe techniques and to preserve traditional rhythms as they were played in the local villages in West Africa.
- There is great respect shown in West African culture for the teacher. Respect in its many forms is the foundation of djembe music, according to Mamady Keita.



Therapeutic West African Drumming

Inner Harbour/Youth Villages



Tom Harris, 1996

Inner Harbour

Developed in 1996 by Tom Harris while working for what was then known as Inner Harbour. Tom, a music major in college, spent his early career as a counselor/therapist servicing youth at the wilderness camp then known as Annawakee. He did a lot of therapeutic backpacking and construction with the youth he worked with, and was also a caver in his private life. In the early 1990s, Tom was injured in a caving accident.....



Djembe Program Begins in 1996

During his rehabilitation, he discovered the Djembe Ensemble and its music. Soon after he convinced his CEO to allow him to begin a therapeutic drumming program. He started with the above drums he taught himself how to build.



The Program Today

Now the Youth Villages Inner Harbour Campus runs 12 therapeutic classes, two performance group classes, and two more staff/volunteer training classes each week. Over 1500 drums have been built!

African Drumming

Drumming Creates Unity



Our Performance Groups!

Performs regularly around the Atlanta-Metro Area. We've performed all over the State of Georgia and have traveled out of State including: Texas, Florida, New York & Washington DC. The above photo is on stage at the Kennedy Center in 2010.



The Yurt!

These classes are held in a Yurt that was built in 2002 through donations by volunteers specifically for the drumming program.



Therapeutic Drumming Instructor Training (TDIT)

Started by Tom Harris in 2009, TDIT is a 10 month program that has graduated a growing number of instructors since its inception.



Therapeutic Drumming Instructor Training (TDIT)

Participants learn how to facilitate West African Drumming groups therapeutically in addition to how to start and run their own programs.

Expansion

- The drumming program has spread to several of the youth villages campuses.
- There are community classes in Douglasville and LaGrange, GA
- Our facilitators are contracted to do camps and after school residencies.

A photograph of a room filled with djembe drums and stools. In the foreground, a row of djembe drums is lined up on a polished wooden floor. Behind them are several black stools with silver metal bases. In the background, more drums are stacked on shelves, and a red chair is visible. The text "NOW SEE FOR YOURSELF!" is overlaid in the center.

NOW SEE FOR
YOURSELF!

Time to play drums!