



African HEARTBEAT

by Magda Lauer

drumming workshops in schools, working with CASE and the *One Love Learning Foundation*, who deal with underprivileged children experiencing the effects of broken homes, abuse, addiction, and emotional trauma.

In performance, I have drummed with many groups over the years. Being a woman in a male dominated culture became quite challenging, so I joined a women's performance group called *Women on Djembe*. I played with the group for seven years at many functions, the highlight being the Soccer World Cup 2010 on the Cape Town Fanwalk. I left the group recently to get more involved with other instruments and now play with a samba group called *SambaAfrik*. I also play with an African ensemble called *Beat It* which focuses more on function performance, playing at weddings and corporate events.

have a profound effect on individuals.

For me, the most powerful thing about drumming is the power of now. Drumming, like playing any instrument, forces you into the present moment. You cannot hold a rhythm if your mind is wandering into the past or the future. Most spiritual paths encourage meditation to train the mind to be present, and drumming does that for me. To be a part of the universal rhythm we have to get in touch with our inner rhythm and drumming is definitely one way to get there.

My prime objective is to use drums and percussion to encourage self-expression and creativity, and to show people the therapeutic and healing power of the drum, assisting in their recovery process."

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A Djembe, which is a West African drum originating in Mali, Guinea Ivory Coast, is traditionally used as a form of communication. Rhythm is the heartbeat of every aspect of the culture, the Djembe always played at ceremonies, weddings and festivals. Djembes from various countries differ slightly, but all are carved from a tree trunk in the traditional goblet shape, with rope tuning.

In recent years, drumming has become a popular activity at various functions, from weddings to corporate team building events, but the most fascinating aspect of this instrument is its benefit as a therapy.

Michelle van Blommestein of *Naturali Catchi Rhythms* has made this her career, or rather; it should be referred to as a calling. She shares her thoughts about her work:

"I founded my own company, *Naturali Catchi Rhythms*, in 2002 with the primary focus on drumming as a therapy. In 2004, I was offered weekly sessions at the Stepping Stones Rehabilitation Centre in Kommetjie and worked with addiction patients. Shortly thereafter, in 2005, I was approached by Valkenburg Psychiatric Hospital to facilitate weekly sessions with maximum and medium security wards, and also with their out-patients, which I did for six years.

In between I played at weddings and held

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Drumming is a powerful tool for transformation and anybody is able to take part, regardless of musical ability. If you have a heartbeat, you have rhythm. Drumming in a circle, which has no beginning and no end, creates the sense of all participants being equal, allowing a flow of energy which encourages support. Drumming brings out many issues in people which can be dealt with non-verbally in a safe environment. The smile on an individual's face at the end of a session says it all.

Drumming is accessible to anyone – deaf people watch the movement of your hands, feel the vibrations through the drum and mimic what you do; blind people feel the vibrations through the skin of the drum and play along by feel. I have also worked with physically and mentally challenged children who manage to bang or shake along to the rhythm with their one hand or a foot. Just being a part of a drum circle, without physically participating, can

