

Drumming the language of the heart

Transcending nationality, culture and age Dubai Drums group drums in the New Year in unison with their musical message of peace for 2007

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ON NEW Year's Eve, the Dubai Drums group headed out to the desert to celebrate the coming of 2007. Around 400 adults and 70 children were all there to have a good time, drumming away, dancing and eating, all uniting through rhythm in the open air, under the moon in tune with the desert's own rhythm.

They sat on the Bedouin style cushions and carpets in the centre and followed the down beat of the facilitator Julie Ann Odell, also the founder of Dubai Drums, who was on stage together with other leading drummers and musical instruments which included the aboriginal instrument the Didjeridu.

In a question and answer form, each member of the audience played away in unison their rhythmic answers; individual spirits like one pounding heart while singing the peace song. Whether it is about channeling ones musical energy or releasing the negativity, one thing is for sure, there definitely was a unity in rhythm as the group like to call it.

Karene from Austria said, "It is something different and new. I've lived in the UAE for two years. I have drummed before. It's very good because there is a feeling of togetherness, that you are doing something with other people,

no matter where they are from, you are not alone. It's very powerful. It is from a different culture and background, different from the European life-style and way of living. We are going to camp out in the desert because I've always wanted to do that."

Another participant Rahma said, "This is my first time. I'm here with my family. It's really great. I love the drumming, and the whole experience of being out here in the desert, with nature is really nice for a change."

Dana from Iran added, "This is my second time. My family and I are from Iran and we love to drum."

Molly McDonald who is visiting her family in Dubai from England said, "I've done drumming before with Julie Ann in a team group in Dubai. It's fun." Her mother pointed out that they thought it would be a good family event to attend for the New Year.

Founder of Dubai Drums Julie Ann Odell who has lived in the UAE for 30 years explains how Dubai Drums was set up. "My background was in public relations but I left my job four years ago because I wanted to do a mind body and spirit festival in Dubai. I was researching all the holistic festivals around the world to see what would fit here in Dubai and I kept seeing drum circles and I thought it was very interesting. Since I hadn't seen any

drum circles here — they do a lot in north America — I arranged for a guy to come from Canada to do a drum circle at the opening of my mind body spirit show. Unfortunately the show did not happen, and I was very disappointed not about the cancellation of the show in particular but that I would not have the drum circle. It was at that moment that I decided to go off and learn all about it. Coincidentally when my daughter got through to the finals in her talent show in South Africa, I felt like my prayers were answered. I thought if I go with her I'm sure I will find someone to teach me drumming and so I did. I ended up taking an intensive drumming course."

When asked why she chooses the drums and not the piano or violin and what it is about the drums that unite people from all nationalities together in one place she says, "I'm not sure. I've always loved music, and I can read music, when I was at school I used to play the piano, guitar and sing but there is something about the beat, the pulse. It could be something to do with the fact that I have lived in the middle east for 30 years and there is a beautiful beat in Arabic music. To me when I play drums or when many people play together, it stirs my soul. How wonderful that people who have never drummed in their



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lives can sit down and I can get them all drumming together, because you can't have a violin circle or a piano circle but you can have a drum circle. Unfortunately what has happened in our day and age is people have been led to believe that unless you are academically taught to play music you can't, but with drums you can because it is all about rhythm and everybody has got rhythm. It is a matter of convincing people that they have got rhythm inside of them, a heart beat. The body is all about rhythm. It's all about encouraging people to feel it. I'm there to help people connect with their rhythm."

Julie explains why she has devoted a large part of her life to The Dubai Drums group: "I've always been very interested in anything related to alternative medicine, or complementary medicine. The drums can be used to unify

people and let them have a lot of fun, but the drums also heal, because it has been medically proven to boost the immune system and raise the endorphins. It is also a de-stressing mechanism because it is a left brain right brain activity so when people drum it brings them to the present moment awareness and takes them into the alpha state. When you are drumming is no time to worry about what happened yesterday, or what might happen tomorrow because you are in the moment. People waste so much of their time worrying."

At the event, there were also fire dancers, a Bangra dancer, and when the New Year dawned, everyone held hands and sang Auld Lang Syne. Many of the people camped out in the desert in tents until the morning where breakfast was served for around 300 people.

An interesting piece of

information that many people might not have known is that in Africa, certain villages 25km away from each other would communicate through music, perhaps making music the first means of communication before speech. It is passed down through generations. In the Middle Ages, the framed drum was also an integral part of European music but eventually faded from the culture as it was discouraged by leaders who at that time felt it should be forbidden.

The Dubai drums also designs various programmes for schools and universities such as team building for teachers, in addition to team building events for organisations such as team creativity, leadership skills and communication skills.

For more information on drumming or on future events log on to www.dubaidrums.com