

THE VOICE OF THE DRUM

Pete Bengry

that I realised the core element of my connection.

Some may presume that the African drum I received as a child was the initial seed of my interest, and yes, externally it was, but internally it was something much deeper.

The internal invitation came from spending my early years in silence, becoming an observer of both the internal and the external realities all around me. My heart became the centre of my awareness towards the world, and to this day it remains the same.

My exploration of rhythm began with my own body and the physical world. This approach provided a sensitive awareness, enabling me to develop my own techniques, which became the foundation of my intuitive learning. I often played in darkness, as this enhanced my ability to explore the many aspects of the drum and my navigation within this sacred landscape.

I found that by using this method, I naturally merged my senses into the sensitivity of my fingertips. I began to see, feel and listen from my fingers, as I explored the presence of skin on skin. Trusting my connection with the drum enabled me to deepen my awareness, all the time being centred from my heart.

Over the years this has developed and the drum has now become a conduit, blending both the internal and external realities together beautifully within all aspects of my work. Having spent over forty years learning - and listening - to both myself and the

From the age of five, I began to explore my communication with rhythm; and this has been refined over at least forty years, forever being guided by the drum.

As a child I knew my faith was the drum. I visited Africa at the age of ten, I was lucky enough to witness the presence of the Zulu people, and immerse myself in their sacred music, which is full of singing, dancing and drumming.

It was then that I received my first drum, and this became my invitation to create my intention, which was to learn and explore all aspects of this incredible instrument. But it was not until discovering shamanism later in life,



Right: Zulu drummers from South Africa

drum; I have refined this connection as a sacred partnership of passion and precision.

I've heard it said that the blind are considered to be the best masseurs, as they explore the contours of the human body through touch; and from my own learning with the drum I would resonate with this.

Having spent so many years of my life playing in darkness, I have continued to refine the sensitivity of my hands as I explore the contours of the drum. And this sensitivity does not simply remain with my fingers, as I allow my entire body to transform its awareness towards all the elements of the senses and more.

One of the most important learnings I have discovered over the years, is that my eyesight detracts me from my true authenticity, when I am creating sacred sounds. My eyes perceive what I see, and within this perception is the potential seed of doubt, based on my cognitive awareness.

With my eyes closed I am fully empowered - with my perception towards precision - as my entire body is filled with this awareness. The drum and I merge, becoming one element of awareness, I no longer rely on my physical vision, as I see and sense from a much deeper level.

This is one of the primary exercises that I share with my students, as often our optical perceptions overpower our awareness. Enhancing the ability to touch from a depth of sensitivity, creates a much greater level of awareness, as potential conditioning regarding our skills are reduced. However it takes many years of practice to achieve and master this

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technique. In the trainings I give, I offer exercises which I have developed and refined over many years, these are designed to help people empower and integrate this element of pure sensitivity.

A LIFE WITH THE DRUM

Having the drum arrive in my life at such a young age influenced all the aspects of my personal evolution. I remember decorating that initial drum I received as a child, and hanging it from my window. I continued to do this in numerous homes throughout my life, until one day I gave the drum away to another child, who I sensed had the same sensitivity I'd had at that time in my life.

It was a wonderful gift to witness, the passion in another child's eyes, as I truly know how much the drum has changed and supported me in my own life, and hoped it would do the same in theirs.

Having spent years previously learning and listening to the drum, as I grew older, I started playing in different bands, originally using a drum kit. I never took any formal music lessons, as I trusted that the drum itself would teach me everything I knew. The communication between the drum and I had begun when I was at such

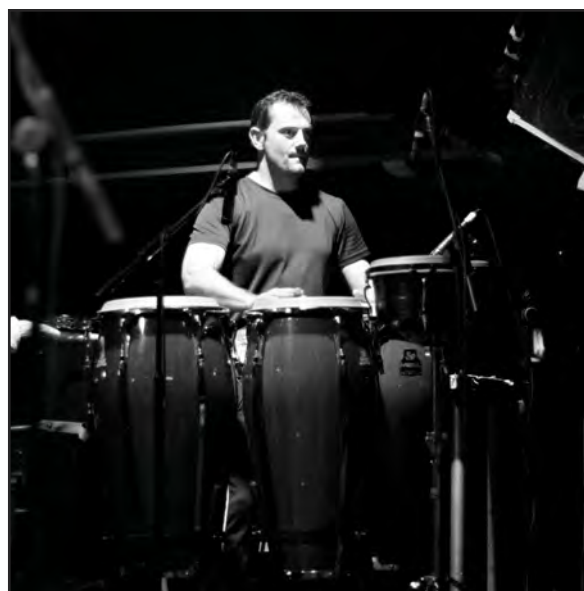
an early age, and we had developed and deepened our own connection over the years, which was based on something that - back when I was little - I could not explain.

Now, after attending numerous workshops and reading books, I understand my birthing with the drum was - in some way - a type of shamanic invitation, perhaps even an initiation of sorts.

In 1994, I joined the British band 'Cornershop' as their percussionist, and later - in 1998,

Below:
the author performing

Bottom:
Cornershop live on stage



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we achieved a number one hit in the UK Singles Chart, and number 16 on the US Billboard, with the song 'Brimful of Asha.'

This experience was, in my opinion, a beautiful opportunity to share everything that the drum had taught me, to a huge number of people, in a variety of venues internationally. To become a professional musician was one of my childhood dreams and one should never underestimate the power of the drum. It was a real honour to share everything that the drum had taught me as a musician, in some of the most incredible music venues throughout the world.

Whilst working with the British rock band Oasis, around this time, I was referred to as 'an octopus,' as I could create so many different rhythms with just one pair of hands. Having mastered those numerous rhythms, taught to me by the drum, I guess I am perhaps considered somewhat of an adept in this field, but my gratitude is always to the drum and also to myself as a child, who chose to listen and learn.

Having immersed myself within the essence of the drum since my childhood, I had developed - what I feel is - an amazing connection, with both myself, and the body of the drum. More importantly I made a commitment to always deeply nurture this connection, from the drum's initial arrival in my life, to the present moment.

It is this commitment which fuels my healing work, as both musician and also as a shamanic practitioner.

I refer to myself as the latter, as I truly believe the drum guided me home to where two heart beats merge - mine and the drum's.

This simple awareness is one of the most important aspects I encourage all of my students to explore. Of course, from a rational point of view, a drum does not

contain a heart beat, but with awareness towards this intention, an incredible connection can occur.

In my life the drum has always presented itself as both a teacher and a guide, and also as a vehicle in which to travel to other realities.

It was when I started to research the link between shamans and drums that my connection made sense, and became very, very real. Within shamanism the drum is a sacred, magical object, worked with in order to reach an altered state of consciousness. It is so more than just a physical musical instrument, and early on I chose not to limit myself with my perception of it.

Today, I focus a lot on my more on my 'shamanic work'. I support people connecting with their drums - both energetically and physically - as a healing tool. People tell me that afterwards they have a much better connection with their drum, which is wonderful to hear. I also offer live performances, which I call 'shamanic sound healing.' I see these as an opportunity for people to experience a deep process of relaxation, received from the drum, voice and various other percussion instruments. These, in my opinion, are a wonderful way people can base their learning experiences on feelings, rather than their thoughts.

In our modern times, we are surrounded by an abundance of information - not all of it is supportive - which we often categorise and analyse. I really believe there is such wisdom in the presence of relaxation. It gives the body time to integrate healing without the presence of the possible analytical mind.

I also teach core shamanism, but my primary focus is working with sound, as I see this as being the true authenticity in my work. There is such presence in silence, and it is this awareness, which has refined my ability to witness both the invisible and visible. I prefer to



focus on the invisible within the silence and then consciously enter the visible space of sound

I have been practising for approximately thirty years, and I welcome the presence of my

healing spirits. The trust I have developed in the process and the connection I have with the spirits, has enabled me to journey deep into the shamanic state of consciousness, and discover the true gifts of the spirits. When I work, I merge so deeply with my healing spirits, that I become a precise puppet for their information. By that, I mean that I do not interfere with their sharing, I try not to get in the way, and because I dedicated my body to them so many years ago, I have - through practice, refined the sacred cords from the spirit world to myself.

In the Western Core Shamanic model - developed by Michael Harner and others - it is recommended that a rhythm of between four and seven beats per second is used, and I initially practised my shamanic drumming in this way. Over many years I have internalised this tempo, and now, when I play, I merge with my spirits, which enables me to change the rhythm of my playing as I deepen my connection, more like traditional shamans do.

As I started my life journey with the drum, I used sticks on drum kits, and my hands on other drums. In time, I blended the awareness of both modalities, as I focussed more on using my hands; and it is this technique that I have retained.

In many ways this awareness increases the sensitivity when my own skin touches the skin of the drum. We merge as we meet. When I do use a beater, I am able to do so almost with it as an extension of my own limb, retaining the same sensitivity as playing with my fingers.

When playing, I always allow myself to be guided by my spirits, and ensure the merging with them creates the composition of the rhythms, rather than them just coming from myself. Having dedicated so many years refining

this technique I find I can easily enter a deep trance and still remain present as a witness to the connection between the drum, spirits and myself

WORKING WITH THE DRUM

People often ask me how to drum, and some people even tell me that they cannot drum - which is, of course - nonsense, as everyone can drum.

When this happens, I simply ask them to look around and witness the birds. They are the true masters of rhythm, they move so elegantly, and so skillfully. Our minds, in contrast, are full of doubts, based on receiving the potential expectations of other people - a patterning which starts to develop from such an early age.

Our beliefs as adults are created by our initial experiences in childhood, and these experiences influence our directions in life.

The beauty of using the drum is it offers us the opportunity to work with rhythm, sensitivity and movement. I think we are at a place in our culture where we really need to be more conscious about these three areas.

Nature follows rhythms, and we, as a culture, have detached ourselves from these rhythms and in

many ways arrogantly created our own. I think our sensitivity has, in many ways, become so blocked that we are in a state of shock - which I see as a type of soul loss. Our movement forward as a culture is often directed by so many different intentions, that we are now rapidly walking in the wrong direction.

Using the drum provides an opportunity to transform ourselves internally, so that our external presence is more in tune with the natural rhythms around us. By doing so, we can connect to the ancient instrument, and potentially bring some of that knowledge into our world as a healing for all life on earth.

We are living organisms, living on a living organism, so we can surely respect the earth enough to play a rhythm that honours her rhythm, sensitivity and movement

Having played the drum for so many years, I was guided to explore every centimetre of it, then continued with every millimetre. Now, when I play, I really sense the guidance of the spirits to work in an even more refined way - seemingly exploring the very atoms of the instrument.

This has enabled me to release my grip of everything I perceive



about myself. The more I refine my connection with the drum, the more I refine my connection with myself, and I become a witness to the sacred space between myself and my drum. This is the invisible space which becomes visible as I merge with my spirits, and it is here where I witness the work they wish to share.

There is an energetic awareness between the skin of my hand and the skin of the drum, and it is here where the magic happens. The two skins bond, and while they do, my



Above and left: the author with one of his drums and teaching a drum circle

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intention is to create an invitation for that meeting. And within this sacred meeting is the presence of my spirits' intention and presence.

All life has a sacred space which exists within the meeting, and it is this space which carries both the invitation and the intention.

This is the essence of the work; witnessing the sacred partnership of both receiving and amplifying, as this meeting takes place.

I remember the very first shamanic training I attended. My teacher suggested that due to my skill with percussion I might be able to travel between realities very quickly; and indeed, this seems to be the case.

Honouring and merging with the drum has developed into such a grounded foundation in both my life, and my spiritual work. The drum has become an extension of my own body, like an additional limb, and the sensitivity and understanding of one another has been beautifully woven.

Below: the author performs on stage



As I sit here writing this article, I can sense the drum in my heart, and that sensation allows me to see from my heart with my eyes closed. This is a wonderful way to go beyond the normal five senses, and allow the genius of our own bodies fully engage with the outside world. The skin of our bodies is as sensitive as the skin of our drums.

All of the personal tuition from the drum I have received over the years has been around mastering the precision of my movements. When my musical journey began, my goal was to witness the presence of each finger, and to centre my awareness, as if all my fingers were working as a single drumstick. This practice enhanced my ability to consciously witness my own movement, as I explored and created rhythms upon the skin of the drum.

When I witness this awareness for myself, I was then able to recognise the energetic sensitivity of the people I work with too - both students and healing clients.

By becoming the witness to the space between the skin of our bodies and the skin of the drum, we can become more sensitive to all aspects of connection. This witnessing can be a huge support when we are navigating the spirit world, seeking answers to our questions, and performing healing.

The drum has taught me to witness with my entire body, integrating all of the aspects of my senses, as I explore the world around me. In many ways I am the drum and the drum is me, for we have merged very deeply over the years.

THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

I believe in the saying 'less is more.' Drums can be loud, and I have certainly enjoyed the volume when beginning my journey in music, playing my drum kit.

But the sensitivity of a sound is what creates the healing, it is not the volume; and I often witness people falling into a trap, whereby they consider that volume is power, and the louder they play, the more powerful their playing becomes.

In my opinion this is untrue. It is the essence of the sound which matters, not the volume. Making the invisible visible comes from sensitive awareness, not from the volume of the sound. The drum can

both sing and shout, and sometimes it may wish to shout, but nearly always it will also sing soft and sweetly, with an elegant hum, similar to that of a lullaby.

I often ask myself, if I cannot mirror what the drum wishes, how can I mirror what the spirits want?

It is arrogant to feel I know more, I do not. I am just someone who has dedicated his life to the drum, and by doing so I have learned to hopefully listen to the message from it - even within the most silent whisper.

I am not a trained musician in the orthodox sense of the word, as everything I know I have learned from the drum itself. And one thing I have learned is that the sacredness of sound is real, but we have to learn to listen before we can hear it and work with it.

I have witnessed many people offering sound healing with bowls and gongs who, in my opinion, have not even listened to the spirit of their instruments. They are so immersed in their own presence, that the sounds they create are merely based on the tone of the instrument and nothing else, nothing deeper. There can, it seems, sometimes be so little awareness of the sacred essence found within the partnership of the self and an instrument.

No musical instrument can create magic by itself, it is the sacred partnership, the player, the essence of the instrument, and the guidance of the spirits, which creates the magic.

I have witnessed so many people who have become lost in the presence of the visible, but yet cannot immerse themselves within the seeds of the invisible.

My role has become to disappear into the invisibility of the spirit world, and over the years I have come to trust that I can bring the knowledge from the invisible, back to the visible, without altering it due to my own perceptions. By witnessing the presence of the invisible, we can receive, and then we can deliver.

One of the greatest disciplines is the art of stepping out of the way, ensuring the invisible is delivered as it is meant to be. As it becomes visible, it should do so naturally, without the interference of our



presence, and the more we allow ourselves to disappear into the essence of the drum, the more we 'become.' It is as simple as that.

Since the very first connection with the drum, my life was changed, and I continued to explore this being, guided by the drum itself.

As I said, I spent years playing alone in darkness, exploring the numerous sounds the drum would share. I allowed the drum to sing and I listened, learned and loved.

Having the drum in my life has been such a gift, and using it within my spiritual practice has enabled me to discover much deeper elements of my presence within this sacred work.

In my opinion, the drum is a shield of protection, an invitation to ecstatic flight, a teacher, a lover, a guide, an authentic part of myself.

I refer to the drum as female, because she taught me gentleness, and to hold myself when I wasn't being held.

She taught me to remember when I had forgotten.

She taught me to listen when I could not talk, and she taught me to talk when the spirits were listening.

She simply represents a sacred gateway between this world and another - the spirit world.

All my healing work is performed using the drum, and since all those years ago when I first learned about how shamans use drums, she has continually guided me home.

I am a man who discovered love when he was looking, and found the drum. And I also believe the drum found me. The drum is a guide - and the most sacred teacher - who supports me with questions which need answering. I truly believe there is no greater teacher than the drum itself, we just have to listen, learn and love.

*To the drum...
Thank you for your invitation.
I create my intention.*

Pete Bengry is a shamanic practitioner, musician, sound therapist, composer and author. He has dedicated his entire life to using the drum as a musical instrument and healing tool. He teaches and performs internationally, sharing his gifts, which have been refined over many years, and remaining present to the voice of the drum.

In 2002, spirit gave him the words 'Being in Beauty' for his healing practice, and the

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message; 'When we look through the eyes of beauty, we see beauty, creating beauty in our lives.' It is this use of words that influences his healing work and teaching methods.

He offers workshops in core shamanism, but his primary skill is working with and witnessing the visible and invisible within sound healing. When he is not travelling and teaching, he composes music and writes short stories and poetry.

As a professional musician Pete has been endorsed by Meinl Percussion, Sonic Energy, Remo, Roland, Paiste, Zoom, Protection Racket and Shure microphones.

www.beinginbeauty.com
email: beinginbeauty@gmail.com

Above: Kurdish sufi drummers, using the drum to enter deeply into a trance state to reach inner silence