

# Global Movement of Women Playing Drums

Carolyn Brandy, June 2008.

Carolyn Brandy with Regla, Aleida Nani Socarras, and Amelita Pedrosa (members of the all female Batá battery Ibbu Okun) in Cuba, 1998.

I believe that there is a Global Movement of Women playing drums on the planet at this time. There are many thousands of women playing drums all over the world. This would not seem so incredible, except for the fact that in the majority of cultures of the world, drums have been strictly forbidden for women to play for eons. This taboo is part of the psychological and spiritual acculturation that claims that the female, and nature itself, is inferior. Women have been so brainwashed and tortured that we actually have believed this ourselves for centuries.

Why are we waking up now? The planet's very existence, as we know it, is being threatened because we are so out of balance. The force of technology, destruction, greed and constriction has become so strong that the creative, nurturing, expansive power of the planet, a complete and conscious living organism, has to come into balance in order to survive. I believe that this movement of women drummers is one of the manifestations of this "waking up" and process of evolving consciousness.

When I started playing drums 52 years ago (1968), I was a loner. Almost any woman who was playing drums before the 1970's will tell you the same thing. It had to be a passion that you just could not give up, because the culture around you was not supportive or inclusive of your endeavors, and there were few women who also played. For the majority of women, it did not matter how skilled you became, the circle of male drummers was an inner circle that was difficult to penetrate because of contractual agreements amongst the men. Whether this contract amongst peers was spoken or unspoken, it was always there through peer pressure, through jokes like "you play like a girl" through intimidation, ie the threat of not being "one of the guys", or through religious rules and gender mandates. Most men felt that women gathered around the music to watch men play because they were potent and attractive, not because it was possible that the women were attracted to the drums themselves.

I have found in my career as a drummer and a teacher of drumming that many women at the same time desire to play the drum, also fear playing it. Women tell me, "I always wanted to play the drum, but I played the clarinet [*or another less 'male perceived' instrument*] instead."

Why would women have a fear of playing drums? The collective feminine consciousness is attacked every day on this planet by the constant war and violence

that is committed against women, and the pain that is delivered on the life force of the planet itself.

When we read that 80-96 year old witches are being burned alive in Kenya (May 21, 2008)[1] and learn of the atrocities that take place all over the globe on women and children: in the Congo and in Darfur; in the Middle-East wars; in China where girl babies are still killed; the pornography, molestation, and abduction of children in every town, village and city of the US; stonings and beheadings; the kidnapping and holding of women against their will. This constant stream of violent occurrences and enactments against the women and their children on the planet is a constant reminder to ALL women that one step out of line, one dark night in the wrong place, one moment of rage, one time being “out of your proper place”, or trusting too much, can still result in being burned at the stake, raped and/or dismembered.

The collective memory of the witch hunts, what Eckhart Tolle calls “the collective pain body” is being kept alive and well:

“Nobody knows the exact figure because records were not kept, but it seems certain that during a 300 year period between 3-5 million women were tortured and killed by the “Holy Inquisition” an institution founded by the Roman Catholic Church to suppress heresy. This surely ranks together with the Holocaust as one of the darkest chapters in human history. It was enough for a woman to show a love for animals, walk alone in the fields or woods, or gather medicinal plants to be branded a witch, then tortured and burned at the stake. The sacred feminine was declared demonic, and an entire dimension largely disappeared from human experience.”[2] Can you imagine if a woman were caught playing a drum, especially with other women or while she was menstruating?

Why is it that women have been virtually forbidden to play drums across the entire planet for thousands of years?

The drum has many powerful properties. One of the most important qualities of the drum is that it is a healing instrument. It has the power to heal, I believe, because it can take us out of our waking mind to a deeper level of consciousness, especially when drums are played in groups. The loss of the self to the whole is a key that unlocks presence. In this presence other dimensions are available to us. We are able to see a shift of molecules and their transparencies, as form becomes less separate and more connected, in the presence of the collective sound. We start to become hyper aware of the waves – sound waves and light waves – that are passing through our bodies, one following the other in mandalas of repeating patterns, one coming after the next, with their constant subtle, and not so subtle, changings of energy and life force. This pure energy of rhythm and color has the code to unlock mysteries that the waking mind cannot comprehend because they do not exist in the world of thought, but only exist in the conscious presence of sound and light. This is why drum masters/maestras teach

us to “feel, don’t think” when we play. The thinking of the rhythm is not the vehicle that will take us into the presence of the rhythm, the presence of the whole, the presence of the ecstatic.

The drum is also an instrument that is loud. It is an animistic cry, a sounding, a rumbling that captures immediate attention from human and animal alike. The drum calls communities together, and indeed is a communal language that is older than modern linguistics. In this language of old were delivered original stories, teachings and parables about good character, how we came to be, and how to live in community. This universal language of the drum contains a supreme intelligence, an intelligence that our thinking minds cannot totally perceive or comprehend. A collective and universal intelligence that is contained inside the presence of interlocking rhythmic patterns that contract and expand, create tension and release, and produce an understanding that is already contained in the function of the atoms and cells of our bodies, in the attraction of our solar system, and the laws of our galaxy and its relationship to other galaxies and dimensions. The drum is that heartbeat that announces consciousness.

The drum is erotic. The drum is sensual. The drum makes our bodies catch those sound waves and express them. Why have women been thought to be “dirty”, or “loose”, or of “lower social standing” if they even wanted to play a drum, instead of, for example a violin. “Why would you want to do that?” Is a question still asked. “I wouldn’t let my daughter [sister, girlfriend, wife] put that drum between her legs.” Is a statement I have heard many times. The very thought of playing a drum renders the female masculine, makes her less desirable, less feminine, less submissive, less willing to go along with the program, and stronger.

Eckhart tolle writes:

“The suppression of the feminine principle especially over the past two thousand years has enabled the ego to gain absolute supremacy in the collective human psyche. . . . If the balance between male and female energies had not been destroyed on our planet, the ego’s growth would have been greatly curtailed. We would not have declared war on nature, and we would not be so completely alienated from our Being.”[3]

We who have the power to recreate the heartbeat have lost the ability to be wholly in its presence and possibility. We have lost the ability to know our own sacredness.

This is why, I believe, there is a Global Movement of Women drumming today. We are waking up.

### *Notes*

[1] “Witches” burnt to death in Kenya BBC News, May 21, 2008

[www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7413268.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7413268.stm)

2 Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth, Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose, p. 155-6

3 Tolle, p. 155

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