

The Drum Circle Family

By Chet Doboie

Call me a Lifer. Like so many PAS members, year after year I trek to PASIC to hang with my percussion buddies, make amazing new friends (young and old alike), experience the most amazing percussionists, learn so many mind-expanding ideas, and hear the most incredible performances by pros, colleges, high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. *Amazing!*

Drums and percussion are life for me. And the people at PASIC—these folks are my people, my family. Going to PASIC is like going back to the “homeland” of my ancestors. I’m sure many agree with me that it is the coolest thing to experience walking around our “PAS homeland” and to experience our people, our instruments, our music.

Over the years, I’ve had the great pleasure to enjoy all that PASIC offers, and I evolved to sharing my passion, as so many do, by serving on PAS committees, performing at PASIC with my drum band the Hip Pickles, and leading drum circles. For 2010, I’ve been invited to lead the Friday night drum circle. I am very excited about this opportunity, because it is a chance to be part of a force to bring our PAS family together to “team drum.” The plan? Together we will create incredible and “feeling-full” grooves, and we will celebrate what we love.

For all of you, “my people,” I invite you to be a *player* at this year’s PASIC and perform, create, and have fun at a very special drum jam that will take place Friday night. Let me explain why this will be a blow-the-roof-off event at this year’s PASIC.

THE MAGIC

You and I are not alone. Friday night, we’re expecting a couple of hundred spirited percussionists who, like us, want to be a part of a mega groove that creates a magical feeling—which in essence, is the reason that we all drum: the magic!

OPPORTUNITY MEETS THE CIRCLE

Probably like most of you, I have a wide range of percussion interests. I love to perform on drumset, hand drums, and corps-style percussion. I’m also very involved in electronic percussion, percussion education, etc. You get

the idea; you speak my language! The passion is endless.

Years ago, when I stumbled on drum circles at PASIC, for me it was like a light bulb went on. I discovered that drum circles are about building an in-the-moment drumming community, giving yourself up for the team, energy, the great grooves, FUN, the friendships.

At a drum circle gathering, it doesn’t matter if you’re fat or skinny, a beginner or an advanced player, young or old, a hand drum player or not a hand drum player, a schooled musician or not, a first timer or a circle veteran. Simply, “the circle” = a beautiful thing! If you are alive, if you love a huge groove, the rhythmical journey that a drum circle takes us on gives us a feeling that is like no other. It is a model for how the whole world should be in harmony. It’s an experience for all of us percussionists to appreciate the



common denominator of how we *all* relate to that primal beat—the magic of a groove!

The “drum circle opportunity” always humbles me with the simple thought, “It’s all about the groove, stupid!” It is about the team; it is about the opportunity to achieve that great feeling when we connect. So this year, at PASIC, I commit to you my personal best for leading and ensuring a special opportunity for everyone who wants to experience the power and magic of the drum circle. We will have an abundance of percussion instruments, supplied by gracious instrument sponsors, for all to play on. So think about it; there are many great offerings at PASIC to enjoy, but Friday night, 9:30 p.m., Room 209, is your opportunity to be a player at the “homeland” and bathe in the rhythm of the night. It’s gonna rock!

Chet Doboie

Late Night Drum Circle

Friday 9:30 P.M.

SHARING THE LOVE

It’s a beautiful thing when all of us can share our passion for percussion with young people, grow new drummers, and pass on to a new generation the joy of being a drummer as it was passed on to us. And the drum circle is the perfect discovery vehicle to inspire this new generation.

At PASIC and other gatherings of serious drummers, we can expect a drum circle that flows like a well-oiled machine. There may be participants who lack specific knowledge of

proper technique on some of the instruments, but the bottom line is that we are people who live rhythm, understand a groove, know the power of dynamics, and realize the importance of pulling colors out of instruments. The result? Awesome.

Leading “newbies” in a successful drum circle experience has its own challenges and rewards. What a great feeling it is to witness and help somebody discover the magic of playing a percussion instrument. But it is a challenge to lead a drum circle filled with newbies and to make the experience fun, successful,

and meaningful in the ears and minds of the performers.

HOW TO CONNECT WITH FIRST-TIME CIRCLERS

With tons of experience working with young people in a drum circle setting with my Hip Pickles in School programs, I’d like to share some ideas that might be helpful to those who might be interested in leading a drum circle for young people. Some of my leading/facilitation techniques will certainly be on display at the Friday night circle. Meanwhile, here are my key thoughts on running drum circles for young people.

1. Be enthusiastic, be animated, smile a lot, offer lots of words of encouragement, and be a fan of what is happening within the circle.

If you love a huge groove, the rhythmical journey that a drum circle takes us on gives us a feeling that is like no other.

2. When I lead a circle, I usually am always either playing a foundation rhythm on djembe or set of dun-duns, or I have a partner or a capable volunteer doing so, or I have a drum loop playing through a sound system. This element is *huge*. By viewing all notes performed by the circlers as valid choices (though some might be better choices than others), I have found that if I have that strong foundation rhythm going, collectively the circle will sound and feel really good as perceived by all involved. And that is the mission.

3. Singing (with or without a microphone) is a great way to make the circle have more life and make it sound more special for the participants. I can sing portions of songs or whole songs, sing some chants, or maybe just sing some mouth drumming. Sometimes I even use tuned bells to create a very simple melody to riff over the group groove. Some of this might be planned or some of it is in the moment.

4. One of my favorite and most successful activities is to start with just the foundation rhythm played by my partner or a volunteer. I let that go on for about 16 bars or so, and let everyone silently feel that groove. Then, I tell everyone that we are about to create a very special composition of music. Layering in one performer at a time, I tell them that when I point to each of them, I want them to play one note or maybe a couple of notes to make the foundation rhythm sound even more special. I warn everyone to be patient and wait their turn. Slowly, we build a team groove one by one. This activity, in my experience, has always been amazing, and everybody involved always seems to feel that we created something special together.

5. Whenever a piece comes to an end, I always lead everyone in enthusiastic applause, and if necessary, I will use hand motions to ratchet up the volume of the applause. It's always important to celebrate the achievement of the circle.

6. After each piece I ask the participants to rotate one place to the right, which allows everyone to get a chance to play different instruments. This is more interesting for everybody, creates some appreciated movement, and everyone gets a chance to try playing another instrument.

7. I always try to keep things simple. I find it important to have the instinct of when to insert

myself and lead, and when to just stay out of the way. A lot of this comes with experience. However, with young people, I find it important to keep them engaged, make up musical games, and offer a lot of praise verbally and with body language.

WE ARE FAMILY

It is universal that we all want to belong and feel good. As I see it, being part of the 8,500-member PAS family is the most amazing experience. At PASIC, there are so many opportunities to find real connections that speak to our needs. All we have to do is participate and we discover great friendships, professional connections, knowledge, moving performances, and opportunities. I hope you come out and join the Friday night drum circle and celebrate the homeland with your PAS family.

Chet Doboe is the founder, arranger/composer for the Hip Pickles Drum Band from New York. Chet has performed at seven PASICs, three Modern Drummer Festivals, two Montreal Drum Festivals, Rhythm Stix in London, the Night of Percussion in Austria, and The Big Bang in the Netherlands. Under Chet's leadership, the Hip Pickles are six-time DCA Drum Ensemble World Champions and have been voted four times as the #1 Percussion Ensemble by the readers of *Drum!* magazine. Chet has written 20 drum instruction books and over 20 articles for *Modern Drummer* magazine. Chet appears on the *Best of Modern Drummer Festival* DVD, the *Larrie Londin* DVD, and the Hip Pickles' *Out of the Jar* CD. Chet is on the PAS Marching and Recreational Drumming Committees and performs with the Hip Pickles (www.hippickles.com) in concert, drum clinics, drum circles, corporate meetings, and Arts in Education programs for young people. PN

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