

## **The Drum**

### **Herstory of the Drum**

The drum is as old as human kind and has been used in all cultures. It is a feminine symbol – a round container that vibrates life.

With its simple structure of animal skin stretched over a wooden hoop, the frame drum is considered to be the first drum ever invented. Its use has been intimately linked to ancient spiritual and religious ceremonies to communicate with the spirits of Nature, ancestors and deities in order to understand the source of illnesses and mishappenings in the world - among other things - and heal them.

In the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean and Middle East, the predominant players were women. They used the drum for religious functions, rites of passage and communal bonding.

In her book, *When the Drummers were Women*, Layne Redmond traces the drum back to the goddess traditions of these ancient cultures and shares many images from temples, wall paintings, vases and reliefs depicting women playing the frame drum.

*“Priestesses of the Goddess were skilled technicians in its (the frame drum) uses. They knew which rhythms quickened the life in freshly planted seeds; which facilitated childbirth; which induced the ecstatic trance of spiritual transcendence. Guided by drumbeats, these sacred drummers could alter their consciousness at will, travelling through the three worlds of the Goddess: the heavens, the earth and the underworld”*

### **Uses of the Drum**

The drum echoes the heartbeat of the Earth and enables us to connect with the rhythm of life.

Studies have shown that the Earth vibrates at a frequency of 7.8 – 12 cycles per second; the drum has a frequency of 7 – 14 cycles per second so when we listen to a drum beat we are aligning ourselves with the earth’s vibration. Each time we beat the drum we send out healing vibrations to the Earth. The indigenous people of North America call the drumbeat the heartbeat of the Earth and believe that through the drum we can feel the heartbeat of the Earth.

The rhythm of the drum beat is many and varied and has many applications.

Within *The Shamanic Drum – a guide to sacred drumming*, Michael Drake describes the different beat patterns of the drum and their effects and explains how drumming synchronises the hemispheres of the brain, resulting in a sense of balance that creates the knowing of what to do (next).



Drumming can be for healing (it actually boosts your immune system), for prayer, for calming and for inducing altered states of consciousness for the purpose of shamanic journeying.

Using the drum during the labour of childbirth helps to reduce the intensity of contractions - the vibration dissipating pain and offering the woman a focal point that enables her to access an altered state of consciousness.

In shamanic traditions, the drum is used to call the spirits and to facilitate the transition of the shaman, via a trance state, to the other realms for the purpose of mediation and healing. Often referred to as the Shaman's Horse, the drum and its beat are what the shaman "rides" between the physical and spiritual worlds when she is journeying.

### **Making your own Frame Drum**

Making your own drum is a deep experience. By approaching the process with awareness and consciousness you not only make yourself a personalised shamanic tool, you can have a shamanic experience, connecting with the animal of the hide you are using, the wood of the frame and the way you are with the creative process.

The sacred relationship between the animal that the skin is from and the person, who will own the drum, begins as soon as you make the intention to create a drum and will be reflected through the whole process. You can trust that you will get the right skin for you and the final product that your drum becomes will be perfect for the work you will be doing with it.

Keep in mind that the process you undergo as you make your drum is reflective of your own birth story, the births of your children (if you have any) and how you do "process" in your life both creatively and in relationship to Other. So in this way, making the drum becomes a 'way in' to your inner workings, a way for you to be present with the imprinting from your own birth and early childhood. This can offer you such insight into yourself, and compassion.

### **The Skin**

We will be using Kangaroo skins for our drum making. *A drum can be made from any type of animal skin and will hold, carry, and represent the 'medicine' of that animal.*

#### *Kangaroo Medicine*

Kangaroo medicine reminds us that we can only move forward, not backward, while staying centered and grounded. It includes leaping away from bad situations, creating a safe home environment, protection of the young, ability to adapt to new situations, strength, stamina and balance.



• THE SCHOOL OF •

# SHAMANIC WOMANCRAFT

From the kangaroo we can learn to balance our physical existence with our spiritual knowledge. they use their instinct to guide them, and so we are being called to let our instincts guide us.

Kangaroos are extremely focused with no room for distractions, their energy reminds us to remain centered and focused, leaping into the unknown without fear and with strength, stamina and power needed to keep moving forward.

## References

<http://www.shamanicjourney.com>

<http://nativesymbols.info/kangaroo/>

<https://www.spirit-animals.com/kangaroo-symbolism/>

## The Frame

The frame of your drum has been made from the wood of two different trees.

(Hoops made by Mountain River Drums)

A 13-sided frame of Pine, oiled with anti-mould linseed oil. Discourages mould in humid environments, and conditions the timber. 13 connected to the moons and the grandmothers.

Hoop Pine, a tree from the dry rainforests of either NSW, Queensland or New Guinea, actually known as *Araucaria cunninghamii*. *Araucaria* is a variety within the conifer division of trees, the same botanical family as pine or fir. And so this tree stands for Objectivity, Far-seeing and Inner Wisdom. The underlying energy is a tree which can see over great distances. It will help us to develop the perceptions and insights necessary to see beyond the present. It will also help us to see and understand things from another's point of view and will aid any situation where far sighted vision is needed. Here, seeing into the future comes from your own wisdom rather than received information in a divinatory sense, and is an indication of an inner perception which is inherent. The Fir (pine) is a strong energy, a sign of good health and vigour, and an elevated state of mind. From here great things can be done, far-sighted actions taken and new objective insights gained. The Fir (pine) indicates strength and healing learnt from past experiences. (Information from the Celtic Tree Ogham)



(Hoops made by Divine Heart Frame Drums)

Paulownia tree is very fast growing, with very large leaves and flowers rich in nectar. It has long been cultivated in eastern asia. The genus was named in honour of Anna Paulowna, Queen Consort of the Netherlands (1795-1865) daughter of the Tsar Paul 1 of Russia. It is also known as The Empress Tree in China.

Paulownia wood is very light, fine-grained, soft and warp resistant. Paulownia wood is four times lighter than oak wood, and half the weight of pine wood. Paulownia has the largest strength/weight ratio among the woody plant species. Paulownia is extremely fast growing up to 20 feet in one year when young. Once the trees are harvested, they regenerate from their existing root systems, earning them the name of the " Phoenix Tree".

So the energy of this frame is potent. It has ancient links with Priestesses, and Empresses. It has deep feminine energy, as a very strong and yet light wood. It is able to replenish itself and others, with the quality of its nectar and roots. It is linked to heaven and earth. The cycles of life/death/life are very present in the energy of this frame.

### **Intention and Observation**

It is important during the drum making process to hold a focused intention - perhaps this could be that you are making this drum to be your tool in your practice as a shamanic midwife. Whatever you are thinking about, talking about or feeling will influence the creation of the drum and its make up (this goes for any creative project, including cooking!).

Holding a mindful, contained space within the Self during the drum making enables careful observation of the process with all your senses especially listening (both with the ears and the heart) to allow any messages of wisdom to be received both from your drum and your own inner knowing at this time. Prayers can be spoken and woven into your drum as you make it to enhance special qualities such as healing, transmitting love, etc.

### **Preparing the Skin**

The unique patterns on the skin of the hide are significant when personalising your drum. Consider these markings when locating the area of the skin you wish to use as the face of the drum. You may also feel called to create your drum with the skin inverted – with the inner side used as the outer face. This may offer great power, yet also vulnerability.

Once you find the area where the drum is calling from, place the template over the skin and trace the drum outline on.

### **Drying the Skin**

It is important that the drum is dried slowly, in a cool place away from direct sunlight. The bath or shower recess is a great place to achieve this. The drying process can typically take up to 8 days. During this time it is important not to use the drum or touch the face unnecessarily. Be patient. While wet the drum skin will feel cool to the touch, once dried completely it will feel closer to ambient temperature.

The conditions the drum dries in will be the conditions it best plays in.

### **Making a Beater**

Beaters are as individual as the drum. There are also infinite ways to make a beater. With this in mind, the general rule of thumb for determining a suitable length for your beater stick is to have it measure from the inside of your elbow to your fingertips. I strongly recommend a walk in the bush with the intention to find an appropriate stick. Gather several samples. You will find that one will call to you. The one you find yourself twirling and playing with as you continue your walk will be a good sign. You could use an old sheepskin car seat cover, or old Ugg boots can work well too.

- The sheepskin is first sewn into a pocket.
- The end of the beater is wound with cloth to give it a little more padding.
- The pocket of sheepskin is then placed over the end and tied with sinew.
- The handle of the beater is wound with the same material the strings are made from. In this example it is the skin itself.

You may also wish to create a beater tip using fabric, leather or other suitable material. Red cotton is the traditional colour and material used for beater sticks.

<https://theotherside.wordpress.com/2010/10/20/making-a-drum-beater/>

### **Tips**

Generally, if you want a sharp crisp sound use a harder beater end, otherwise, if you want a more soft base sound then use a softer beater end. You may also consider having a couple of beaters depending on what sound you are after with each use. Soft ones are great for when the kids are in bed and the drum calls!

### **Care of your Drum**

For the first cycle your drum travels around the sun (one year), it will vary quite considerably in tension between seasons. Expect this as the drum settles in and gets to know you.

Always keep your drum in a cool dry place, avoid full sun and rain. Never leave it in a hot car especially on the back ledge.

If you go to play your drum and the skin is slack – it is cold – to fix this you will need to warm the skin. If the slackness is mild you can circulate your hand around the skin using your body warmth to heat the skin. If it requires more you may need to wave it over a source of heat such as a fire, heater or even a hand or hair drier. Be careful not to heat it too much as the skin may dry out and crack. The more you heat it the higher the pitch. Periodically test your drum for the desired pitch as you heat it. If you find you have overheated it and are concerned because it sounds like striking a tin can when you strike it, spray a little water evenly into the back of the drum – but be very careful.

### **Decorating your Drum**

The head or face of the drum can be ‘painted’ with a design, using water colour paints, coloured chalk or crayons. The best results are obtained if the painting is done immediately after the making, before the hide dries. You can also paint a dried drum - it works best if you add some glue to the paint. Coloured chalk and caked water colour paints are not suitable at this time, with the best results being from paint powder made to a thin paste with water and a few drops of liquid glue. (“How to Make Drums, TomToms & Rattles” by Bernard Mason p79). Weaving ribbons or wool and hanging feathers from the back of the drum is also a lovely way to add your personal touches to your beautiful creation.