

VOICES

Nothing humdrum about drumming

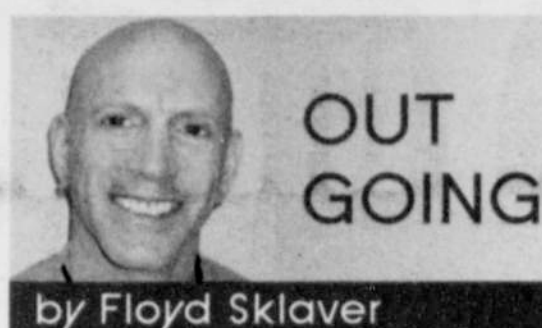
A friend forwarded me an email with a tantalizing headline: "First Saturday Queer Brothers Drum Circle (and Pot Luck)." "Oh my gods and goddesses," it began, "We had such a good time at the last drum circle. The beat hung out in my head, toes tapping, for at least a week. Good times, good food, lots of cold beer and no neighbor complaints."

Of course I needed to experience it for myself.

Feeling tense, I made my way to a conventional-looking house on a somewhat busy street in Southeast Portland. From outside I heard a faint beating, but I wasn't certain whether it was drums or my heart. I took a deep breath, smiled and opened the door.

Inside, about ten guys in their early 30s sat, stood or knelt, each beating on a drum. There was no leader and, it seemed, no rules. "Well," I thought, "as Michael Jackson said: Just beat it."

I nodded hello and made my way to an empty spot on a couch, stepping around an assortment of drums and other noisemakers on the floor. Unsure of what to do, I placed my drum between my knees, closed my eyes and listened. Pretty soon my hands began rubbing the instrument's silky skin. I started lightly tapping. Then tapping a little louder. And louder. Without consciously realizing it, I had joined the riotous cacophony, which



by Floyd Sklaver

continued for about twenty minutes.

During a break, I introduced myself to the host, an artist who said to call him **August**, "nothing more, nothing less." He began hosting drumming parties during the summer at Sauvie Island and now holds them monthly at his home, where his paintings cover the walls.

The drumming began again. Some guys looked joyous, others intense. One tapped a blue plastic detergent container with a drumstick. Another knelt and held an 18-inch drum between his knees, playing a steady rhythm that thumped like a heartbeat. The sonic pattern of his instrument took control and soon we were all matching it. On the couch next to me, a young hipster blew into a didgeridoo, its low, resonant pitch adding to the primal experience.

The music swelled as drummer after drummer joined the chorus. August grabbed a whistle, tooted it three times and threw it into the middle of the circle. Someone on the periphery started to dance. The door opened

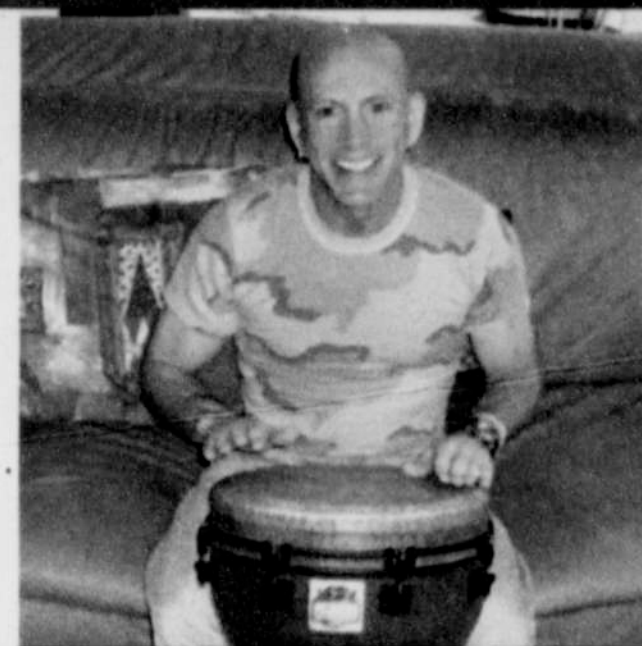
and two newcomers walked in. August let out a welcoming howl and we all joined him like wolves baying at the moon.

We continued like this for three hours. When we were in a rhythm together, the sensations reverberated through the air. There was an unspoken intimacy between us, and I imagined this must be what it felt like to be in a band. At one point, it even sounded as though the drums were singing, as if little sprites circled in the air around me.

I don't think I was very good. But it didn't matter. My heart pounded with excitement, I felt joyful, and the smile I had originally plastered on as a defense mechanism became real.

The beat stayed with me for days. So when I attended the monthly Salon Q gathering, I asked those assembled what excites them and makes their hearts pound.

For some it is physical activity. **Darold Slack** gets excited running through the streets of his Vancouver neighborhood. **Grayson Kramer** finds that Pilates makes his heart pound, although he says, "I go to a private club with a bunch of old ladies, so I need to get into a zone with the music." **Michael Rouse** gets his kicks by "thrill seeking, skydiving and anything fast." And **Michael Sweeten** says the "thrill of the unknown" gets him excited, particularly "snowboarding a new place and meeting new people."



Floyd gets his rhythm on at the First Saturday Queer Brothers Drum Circle.

Morgan Hawes shares, "Plastic surgery turns me on. It's an opportunity to feel so much better about myself and it gives me confidence." **Greg Fletcher** says that his boyfriend of twenty years, **Byron Page**, and their two Dobermans "put a smile on my face." **Rob Lamagno** is turned on by good conversation, and **Kelly Lynch** says her switch is flipped by "Makers on the rocks and tight Diesel jeans."

For those of you who aren't comfortable making small talk at Salon Q, I heartily recommend drumming. If you're interested, e-mail August at bustedzipper@hotmail.com. It's a way of making a big impact, even if you aren't Out Going. JO

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