References


Michael Tacon is a men’s counsellor in Calgary. He facilitates ongoing men’s support groups and leads men’s retreats. He likes to use drumming and chanting as well as live and recorded music in his work with men. His address is 3231—27th Street SW, Calgary, T3E 2E9, (403) 246-1834.

---

Ritual Drumming in the Men’s Movement
A Personal Experience
Fred Holliss

I entered a room in a community hall. All the furniture had been pushed back against the walls or taken out of the room. There was a circle of men, perhaps sixteen or twenty of them, of all ages, seated in chairs or on the floor. Each had a percussion instrument of some sort in front of him, and there were some spares scattered across the circle.

An older, grizzled man with a giant drum that looked like it had been carved out of a tree stump was slowly pounding a steady beat with a carved branch that had its head bound in padded leather.

As I entered the circle, someone pushed over a shallow drum and someone else nudged a beater towards me. Feeling nervous, as I didn’t know any of these men, I sat down cross-legged right where I was and picked them up.

The steady beat was nearly hypnotic, and as it continued other men around the circle picked it up. I could feel it soak into my body. Almost without volition, I started pounding my drum with the striker. As the beat developed, some of the drummers started putting in little frills and accenting it in various ways. I found myself following the lead of a man across the circle, and then a few others started following me, and before long the beat had doubled itself.

By now my heart was pounding in time with the rhythm, and I ceased all conscious thought. I was not analyzing my performance or criticizing anyone else’s. I was not rehashing my day at work or worrying about what I had to go home to. I was not worrying about the repairs my car needed or keeping up my payments. I was not thinking of anything; I was only a part of a rhythm beast.

I don’t know how long we kept up the beat, mutating it into various different forms, but eventually it faded out until there was, once again, only the older man pounding the same steady beat he had always kept while we swirled around him, and he slowly brought that to a close, striking more and more softly until the beat faded into silence.
Fred Holliss is a performance poet and founding member of the M.E.N.S. Network in Calgary. He has also broadcast over 370 shows on CJSW-91 FM, runs a desktop publishing business, consults to the oil industry and still finds time to down the occasional beer at the Ship and Anchor while keeping the beat of the music with his feet.