

Sharing Aloha in Drum Circles

By Jeremy Kirk

Drum circles promote a sense of community through shared experience, and they may also foster intercultural understanding through music. Many drum circle facilitators introduce traditional rhythms from cultures around the globe to help achieve these benefits. This article is provided to help facilitators share rhythms and culture of Hawai'i. By doing so, facilitators may offer their drum circle participants an additional global perspective and an experience that intrinsically features an abundance of love and great respect.

The cultural art forms of Hawai'i nei (beloved Hawai'i) are extremely underrepresented in western curricula, so it is my passion, privilege, and kuleana (responsibility) to share my knowledge with my students and others across the globe. I am fortunate to combine what I learned as a student, practitioner, and now kumu (teacher) of hula kahiko (pre-contact hula) with my formal western music education and my experience as a professor.

Before one begins teaching and incorporating traditional rhythms found in hula, it is important to identify our goal and kuleana. As a facilitator, the fundamental goal is to bring awareness of and respect to Hawaiian culture and help drum circle participants understand and share the Aloha spirit. We must ho'omau (perpetuate) and malama (protect) while helping others experience and share love (Aloha) and mana (spiritual energy).

What is Aloha? Many people think of Aloha as a greeting, a "hello." While that is true, Aloha has a much deeper meaning. Aloha is love, compassion, mutual respect, and an acknowledgment of the miracle of life. This concept is found around the world. In Samoan culture, it is called Talofa. In Maori culture, it is Aroha. In Bantu speaking regions of Africa, it is Ubuntu. The Hawaiian language is beautifully poetic. If we break down the word Aloha, we have "alo" and "ha." Alo is presence, or to be in the presence of; ha is breath, or breath of life. Aloha acknowl-

edges that we are in the presence of the blessing of life and that we all share this breath together.

In another context, Alo means "face" or "to face." The traditional Hawaiian greeting is not to shake hands, but to face each other nose to nose and share breath through the nostrils by breathing simultaneously. For further context, consider the traditional teaching of Aloha to keiki (children) as they are learning their place in the world: *Aloha is being a part of all, and all being a part of me. When there is pain, it is my pain. When there is joy, it is also mine. I respect all that is as part of the Creator and part of me. I will not willfully harm anyone or anything. When food is needed, I will take only my need and explain why it is being taken. The earth, the sky, and the sea are mine to care for, to love, and to protect. This is Aloha.*

When facilitated correctly, drum circles organically employ the spirit of Aloha. Participants actively listen, empathetically respond, create space for others, and develop an understanding of their role in the group. This, too, is Aloha.

Once we have discussed and/or demonstrated the spirit of Aloha in the circle, it is now our kuleana to share knowledge of the culture and history of Hawai'i. It is understood that people who attend a drum circle event are there to actively participate and not to hear a lecture. So, create brief hand-resting periods to discuss some important cultural and historical points. Please be aware that, if you choose to research and share information about Polynesian cultures, many online resources offer inaccurate and sometimes inappropriate information. For your convenience, here is a list of talking points that you may choose to share with your circle:

- Hawai'i can be translated as "breath (ha) across the water (wai)." This can be viewed as the life/love/sharedness across the water, or from another perspective, the creator's (akua) breath across the water; God/creator/akua shared breath across the water and provided life to the people.

Aloha is love, compassion, mutual respect, and an acknowledgement of the miracle of life.

- The national instrument of Hawai'i is both the ukulele and pahu (drum).

- Ukulele should be pronounced as "oo koo lay lay." The ukulele is based on the machete, originally introduced by the Portuguese who came to Hawai'i to work in the sugar cane fields. Ukulele translates as "jumping flea." Kanaka Maoli (indigenous Hawaiians) dubbed this instrument "ukulele" based on the Portuguese's playing technique, as their fingers appeared to move like "jumping fleas."

- The pahu was originally made of a sharkskin drumhead over a hollowed-out log (usually koa or palm). It is reserved for sacred hula.

- King Kamehameha I conquered and unified the Hawaiian islands and is celebrated annually in Hawai'i on June 11.

- Prior to being taken by the United States, Hawai'i was a kingdom with its own monarchy. In 1887, United States businessmen held King David Kalakaua at gunpoint to sign a new constitution that gave away monarchy power, stripped kanaka maoli (Native Hawaiians) of land rights, and gave voting to foreign landowners. Thus, the term "Bayonet Constitution" is used. The monarchy was completely overthrown in 1893. The kingdom was annexed by the United States in 1898 and Hawai'i became the 50th U.S. state in 1959.

Like Aloha, the story of the Bowl of Light is shared with keiki as they are learning about the world of which they are a part. Immediately upon birth, each child has a Bowl of Light. If you tend to your Light, it will grow and you can do all things – swim with mano, fly with 'iwi, know and understand all things. If you become jealous, envious, negative, or anything that opposes aloha, you drop a stone into your bowl. The stone causes some of the Light to go out because stone and light cannot occupy the same space. If you continue to put stones into your bowl, the

Light will go out and you become a stone. A stone does not grow or move. If you tire of being a stone, simply turn your bowl upside down. The stones will fall out and your Light will shine and grow once more.

IPU HEKE TECHNIQUES

The ipu heke is a double gourd drum used by the kumu that can accompany both hula kahiko (pre-contact hula) and hula 'auana (post-contact hula). Ipu translates as "gourd" and heke "top." Thus, ipu heke is a gourd with a gourd on top, or a double gourd.

As with most music from across the globe, drum rhythms are based on the dance movement. The ipu heke is traditionally played by holding the kaula (braided cord) with the non-dominant hand and using the dominant hand to play on the side of the bottom ipu.

The bass tone (bottom-space notation) is created by lifting the ipu heke by the kaula and gently striking the bottom of the ipu on the ground covered with a pale ("pah-lay"), which is a soft pad (Photo 1). The slap tone (top-space notation) is produced by slapping the fingers against the side of the ipu (Photo 2). Basic tapping tones (middle-line notation) are produced by using the thumb (Photo 3) and middle, right, and pinky fingers (Photo 4) against the side in a rotating motion, similar to double lateral strokes in marimba performance. The thumb always begins the rotation motion to create the first tap, because it is closer to the kumu and represents the sound coming from within the kumu.

ADAPTABLE IPU HEKE RHYTHMS

It is important to note that the titles in the musical examples are names for fundamental hula steps and not rhythms. The rhythms notated do not necessarily belong to each hula step. A

Photo 1: Ipu Heke bass



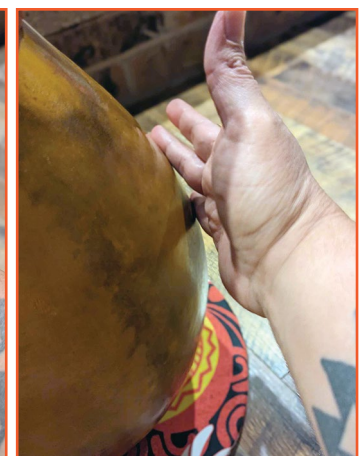
Photo 2: Ipu Heke slap



Photo 3: Ipu Heke tap (thumb)



Photo 4: Ipu Heke tap
(middle/ring/pinky)



hula step does not have its own assigned rhythm that pertains only to it; in each halau, kumu (teachers) will use their own rhythms for instruction. It is also understood that the facilitator and drum circle members will not have an ipu heke. In fact, I would discourage the use of an ipu heke outside of its traditional context unless the bearer fully understands its role and connection.

With the blessing of my kumu, these rhythms may be shared using more common drum circle instruments (djembes, tubanos, congas, etc.). The bass tone of the ipu could be substituted using the common bass tone for djembe or conga. The tap tones could be performed as standard open tones on djembe or heel-toe tones of conga. Ipu slaps could be performed as standard slap tones on djembe or conga. The rhythms may be layered, as in most typical circles, or performed alone as the facilitator chooses. With the understanding of shared cultural respect, they may be performed with rhythms of other cultures at the discretion of the facilitator as long as the circle is taught about their context and the spirit of Aloha as mentioned above.

Adaptable Ipu Heke Rhythms

KEY

Bass Tap Slap

Ka'o

Kaholo

Hela

Ami

Ami (variation)

Uwehe

Uwehe (variation/advanced)

Kawelu

I hope this article will help you incorporate true Aloha into your next drum circle. It is now your kuleana to share this information in a respectful manner to help better strengthen global citizenship and intercultural understanding among members of your drum circle. I am always available as a resource and am happy to help with collaboration, clinics, lectures, workshops, etc. So, please reach out. Happy drumming and much Aloha to you!

Jeremy Kirk is Chair of the Division of Performing Arts and is Associate Professor of Music at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas. Recipient of the Southwestern College Exemplary Professor of the Year Award, Kirk is deeply committed to providing students the skills necessary to excel in today's world as educators, performers, and citizens. He combines his traditional training in Western percussion with his extensive knowledge in world music to create a unique global perspective in his teaching and performing. To connect with and learn more about Kirk, visit www.jkpercussion.com.