

The Ancient Path of the Frame Drum

One afternoon on my way home from school when I was thirteen I laybied a small drum I'd had my eye on for ages. Once a week I'd slide over my two dollars until at last the little drum was mine.

I rushed home, and sitting on the old green couch in the late afternoon light, lifted the drum to my face and breathed deeply the smell of wood. I held the drum up to the shafts of lowering light, and saw the backlit glowing veins of a once living being.

Something ancient and profound stirred in me that afternoon - a kind of sensory memory of having held a drum in my hands before, lifetime after lifetime.

But this was working class Newcastle in 1971. The ancient memories that were stirring had no place to reside within me back then - they retreated to an unlistened to part of myself, only to stir and come to light once again in my late 20s.

The path to rediscover my ancient lineage as a sacred frame drummer has been a long one, and this I know: over the past 25 years as a frame drum player, maker, teacher and

healer, so many people have expressed that they too are stirred by the sound and vibration of the drum, activated in some ancient part of themselves that they can't explain.

What is a frame drum?

Daf, Doire, Mazhar, Tah, Bodhran, Timbrel, Riq ~ they're all from the ancient family of frame drums, a powerful women's instrument that has been played for healing, ceremony, and as a technology for transformation, for thousands of years.



A round timber frame with animal rawhide stretched across it, usually played with the fingers of both hands, though also with a stick

Believed to have evolved from the grain sieve, frame drums are usually made from a round, though sometimes square or multi sided wooden frame with the skin of an animal stretched over it.

Unlike a conga or djembe type of drum, the resonating chamber of the frame drum is the air itself.

There's an incredible range of tones and sounds that can be produced from this deceptively simple instrument.

We stretch the tone, bend the notes, scratch and caress the skin of this once living being. We know that it lives still, and coupled with our technique and intention, know it as a sacred vehicle through which we channel Spirit.

Origins of the Frame Drum

The earliest known depiction of a frame drum is from a wall painting in Catal Huyuk in modern day Turkey, believed to be from 5800BC.

There are literally thousands of ancient images depicting women and goddesses playing the frame drum for ceremony, healing, trance and music making.

In 2380BC, Sumerian texts speak of Lipushau, spiritual head of the Temple of the Moon at Ur, and designated player of the Balag-di frame drum.



2380BC ~ Sumeria
Preistess Lipushau holding her small Tah style frame drum, also called the Balag-di.

The Old Testament contains numerous references to the ancient frame drum, the Timbrel.

And Miriam, the Prophetess,
sister of Aaron,
took a Timbrel in her hands
and all the women went out
after her
with Timbrels
and with dances.

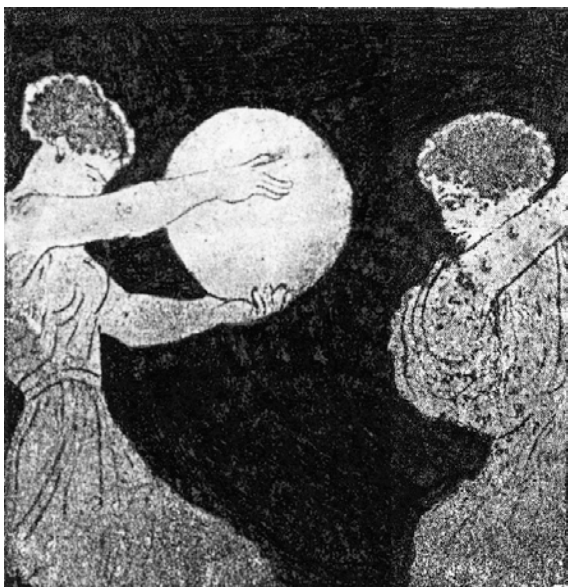
Exodus 15:20

By the time Rome adopted Christianity around 200-300 AD however, it was decreed a heretic act to play the frame drum.

Why was playing this simple drum so feared by the early church that it was forbidden?

Rhythmic sound reaches into deep levels of our consciousness and expands our awareness. If you take away someone's rhythm, you take away an aspect of their inherent power – the knowledge that all beings are connected through the pulse of Life.

Playing rhythm changes us – it opens us to a deeper knowing of ourselves.



Greece, 5th century BC

If we become disconnected from our own source, we become physically and emotionally out of balance. Out of rhythm.

Frame drumming restores our knowing of ourselves and each other as deeply sacred and rhythmic beings, gradually helping us synchronise back to a healthier more balanced state.

When we play the frame drum with an open heart and clear intent, we connect to the power of All That Is.



The power of the ancient frame drum, once feared and banned, is back.

And so are we, holding that power, literally, in our own hands.