

# Frame Drums and History

From the Mediterranean to Motown—  
where frame drums have taken me

By Layne Redmond

For most of us whose life is defined by the playing of music there is a striking musical moment that rearranges our mind forever. For me it was hearing the beginning of Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." Wherever I am, whatever I am doing, if that song comes on I stop and listen with my full awareness. I have never grown tired of that song, but until recently I was unaware that it had not only indelibly stamped my consciousness but probably influenced the course of my entire life.



to hear audio files and see videos.

It wasn't until I saw a clip from the DVD *Standing in the Shadows of Motown*<sup>1</sup> where marimbist and tambourine player Jack Ashford explains how the Funk Brothers, the Motown house band, came up with the rhythmic intro for that song. I knew that Jack's tambourine had given Motown songs a unique sound, but I had never thought about that extended roll of shimmering jingles on his tambourine as an echo of one of the world's oldest percussion instruments, the sistrum, used in religious rites throughout the ancient Mediterranean world and commonly played with the frame drum. In ancient Egypt the hieroglyph for sistrum also meant "to shine, to give out light," and the sound of the sistrum was thought to purify and transform one's consciousness. Eventually the jingles would migrate from the sistrum to the frame drum, creating a tambourine. Ashford describes the beat on the tom-tom "being like the old Indian war dance; [we] took it and put a backbeat to it."

The Native American drum that creates the beat for what Jack refers to as the "war dance," along with the tambourine, belongs to the family of frame drums—the world's oldest known drum. Little did I know at age fifteen that I would have a musical and writing career based on frame drums. In fact, it would be another dozen years before I even heard that term.

It's great to have the opportunity to focus on the frame drum in this first interactive online edition of *Percussive Notes*. I've been watching and participating in the incredible transformation of hand percussion through the vast web of Internet connections created by players in every corner of the world.

Originally this happened through Yahoo discussion lists, Tribes, and then it really went to another level with MySpace. As that medium faded away, Facebook has provided a lively matrix for drummers, but all along and most importantly for me, YouTube has been the medium through which techniques, rhythms, and history is being shared. Through the network of Facebook thousands of drummers across the planet have given me links to YouTube videos they post of their concerts, lessons, and, most dear to my heart, their family or neighborhood gatherings of musicians.<sup>2</sup> Through



Motown's Jack Ashford

these social networking and sharing sites I'm seeing a worldwide fusion of techniques right before my eyes.

I have many video clips and photos that illustrate the backstory of my own involvement in frame drumming, which can be added to the *Percussive Notes* archive. This media will help me illuminate what has happened in the United States in the last 30 years that I personally witnessed. Looking back over my own career—how I got involved with the frame drum, who my teachers were, who my fellow students were—allows me to present the meaning of the events that unfolded as we pursued making music based on the frame drum. This is not meant to be a complete history, but rather just how it looks from my perspective—a conversational and personal narrative history of things I remember.

Frame drums range in size from the 4-inch south Indian kanjira up through the tambourines, tars, bendirs, doiras, duffs, the 22-inch Celtic bodhran, and the 30-inch Brazilian panderao, to name only some of them. Frame drums can be a simple hoop of wood with a stretched skin or can have jingles, snares, pellet bells, or hanging chains attached to the inside of the frame. Still one of the primary percussion instruments throughout the Middle East and other parts of Asia, in the last 20 years frame drums have taken a position in contemporary music and in percussion departments around the United States.

The frame drum is the world's oldest known drum, persisting in popularity since the first appearance in the archaeological record around 5600



Syrian/Anatolian sistrum, c. 3000 B.C.E.

B.C.E. in the Neolithic village of Çatal Höyük (modern Turkey), where it continues as a popular instrument to this day. It was at the core of the liturgical music and mystery rites across the Mediterranean world—Anatolia, Sumer, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece, and Rome—and was popular in the early history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, in which it still is an important instrument. Probably the most extensive music schools in the ancient world were connected to the temple organizations or the courts in ancient Sumer and Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Curt Sachs, one of the earliest ethnomusicologists who created a still-used classification system for musical instruments, came up with the name “frame drum” to designate drums in which the diameter of the head is much wider than the depth of the shell.<sup>4</sup> Sometime before 2000 B.C.E., the round frame drum shows up in images and texts in Sumer, (contemporary Iran and Iraq), where the drum is still popular particularly with the Kurdish people. The online documentary *The Cure Women*<sup>5</sup> shows a contemporary ritual using the frame drum that echoes descriptions of its ancient use. Around 1700 B.C., the round frame drum appears to move from the Middle East into Egypt. A rectangular frame drum is seen in Egypt around 1500 B.C.E. that migrates later to Spain and Portugal, probably brought there during the Moorish Invasion.<sup>6</sup> The most information about ancient music survives in the Greek and Roman archaeological records and the frame drum plays a primary role in these cultures.<sup>7</sup>

The Spanish and Portuguese took the frame drum with them to the New World where it is still popular in Puerto Rico in the plena tradition and in Brazil as the pandeiro and shows up also in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. I am sure the frame drum is to be found in other places in the Caribbean world and Central and South America.

## MY FIRST EXPOSURE

I came across frame drumming in 1981 when I first started taking lessons from Glen Velez. Glen studied percussion at Manhattan School of Music and was very influenced by Metropolitan Opera Orchestra timpanist Fred Hinger. Through Glen’s involvement with the Steve Reich ensemble and the introduction to world drumming through Russ Hartenberger and Bob Becker, he began studying the South Indian mridangam with Ramnad Raghavan. Raghavan noticed an orchestral tambourine of Glen’s and began playing it kanjira style in what we have come to know as the split hand technique. The kanjira is the small South Indian frame drum with a single set of jingles and was the first frame drum Glen studied.<sup>8</sup> Completely inspired, Glen searched for other traditional players of frame drums and found Hanna Mirhige and Michel Merhej Baklouk from Lebanon who played riq, Zevulun Avshalomov from Azerbaijan who played gaval,<sup>9</sup> and Brazilian Erasto Vasconcelos (brother of Nana Vasconcelos) who taught him pandeiro. Hanna Mirhige and Michel Merhej Baklouk played in Middle Eastern clubs in Manhattan for many years and Baklouk also taught some riq classes in Manhattan that many of the early frame drums students took, including Glen, Rowan Storm, Yousif Sheronic, Gordon Gottlieb, Glen Fittin, myself, and Jan Hagiwara.

By the time I met Glen in 1981, his fusion of techniques was reaching a state of innovative maturity, and this fusion is what he taught me, so originally I did not study any traditional style. In the early 1980s we began to call our frame drum duo Handdance. Within a couple of years we were performing at venues like the New Music America Festivals and recording for Music of the World,<sup>10</sup> founded by Bob Haddad, and CMP Records,<sup>11</sup> founded by Kurt Renker in Germany. *Handdance* was also the name of the first recording for the fledgling Music of the World company, and I believe the first recording of frame drums used for contemporary compositions in the U.S. or Europe. Our first CD for CMP, *Internal Combustion*, was a more complete elaboration of compositions for frame drum.

Some percussionists were recognizing the uniqueness of what Glen was creating and began studying with him, including Chris Lamb, principal percussionist of the New York Philharmonic, and Kay Stonefelt, who teaches percussion at SUNY at Fredonia. A young percussionist from Mannes College of Music, John Loose, also became Glen’s student in the early ’80s and joined Handdance. I’d had no previous musical background besides intensive

tap-dance training, so John was his first really committed traditional music student who made a complete study of all the styles Glen was developing.

Before I met him, Glen had begun compiling research on the ancient history of the frame drum, deciding to concentrate on frame drums played with hands rather than sticks. This personal decision was based on what interested him and was also a way of dealing with the vast number of frame drum styles found around the world. Out of these different world traditions he began to develop his own style and techniques of playing the frame drum. He always said he preferred taking the frame drums out of their traditional contexts. Yet he did play traditional music of the Caucasus in the folkloric group Kavkazi with his teacher Zevulun Avshalomov from Azerbaijan and Jeffrey Werbock.

Glen also did a few concerts with the Ensemble for Early Music (EEM), based in Manhattan, around 1981 or ’82. A few months later, Fred Renz, the director of EEM was looking for someone to take on a more permanent role, starting with a tour to Israel. Glen recommended John Loose, and he played with them on and off for eight years. John relocated to San Francisco many years ago but still plays regularly with Musica Pacifica, the U.C. Berkeley Camerata, and Sonoma Bach.

At that time, Early Music tambourine playing was a blend of rhythmic comping, Arab-world techniques, and jazz. There is a lack of written music for the Middle Ages that specifically calls for percussion, so there is a strong reliance on the study of iconography found in paintings and sculpture depicting various ensembles with a percussionist, usually a tambourine player. The melodic fragments that have been preserved in manuscripts leave hints about the rhythmic structure of the piece, especially if it’s known as a dance. Later I was to pursue the same path of studying iconography and fragments of music in creating my concerts based on the ancient music and ceremonial rituals of the Mediterranean world.

Bringing a fragmentary piece of music to life takes a special kind of improviser, one who is familiar with the repertoire of other early music performers, and tambourine techniques from the Middle East and Europe. It’s common to use tambourines because of the huge dynamic range, from fingers in soft position all the way to huge shaking triplet motions that can be deafeningly audible. Many of these techniques come from contemporary Egyptian riq playing, but generally no traditional Middle Eastern rhythms are used.

I’ve often thought that the role Glen trained me for and I flourished in is similar to the role of a clavé player. I held steady the basic rhythmic structure that Glen used as a basis for his improvisations. He also held me to the tempo to which he could easily play double time. I’ve always been quite contented in this role, and it is one that I’ve used as the basis for many

of my own compositions. Like Glen, I’ve sought out great melodic improvisers to work with, and fantastic percussionists to layer over the top of what I’m doing to produce more complex patterns. I’ve been happy to have my frame drum be the pitch center to which all the rest of the percussion is tuned to and structured over. The overtones of this percussion bedrock then give rise to the melodic structures that form the melodies and harmonies of the compositions.



Layne Redmond and Glen Velez

I came across a great definition of *clave* in David Peñalosa's *The Clave Matrix*: "It is a Spanish word meaning 'code,' 'key,' as in key to a mystery or puzzle, or 'keystone,' the wedge-shaped stone in the center of an arch that ties the other stones together." That's how I feel about my role in the music I played with Glen and what I've gone on to create myself. A humorous side benefit is that I'm feeling no pressure to defend a territory of speed and virtuosity that I once dominated against younger percussionists that have grown up with the new fusion at their fingertips! I'm astounded at what I'm seeing world wide in terms of virtuosity of techniques and fusion of complex rhythmic systems, particularly in Turkey right now.<sup>12</sup>

The *doumbek* players from Turkey have adapted the split hand concept from India for both hands rather than simply the dominant hand, using the elements of rhythmic concepts from the North Indian *tabla* and incorporating all the traditional finger-snapping techniques indigenous to their region of the world. The rise of YouTube and frame drum festivals in the U.S. and in Europe has also given a platform to and developed audiences for astonishing solos.<sup>13</sup>

## OTHER PLAYERS

On June 12, 1982, at a huge peace rally in New York City for nuclear disarmament, I spotted Alessandra Belloni<sup>14</sup> playing Italian *tambourine* with her ensemble in the parade. Glen and I tracked her down, and he arranged to study the Italian style of frame drumming with her. Alessandra is a singer, percussionist, dancer, and actress and has been the most influential voice of traditional southern Italian music and dance in the United States. She is the Artistic Director and Founder of *I Giullari di Piazza* (the Players of the Square), and is artist-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. She continues to play and teach traditionally but has also created a fusion of Italian and Brazilian techniques. Glen performed and recorded with Alessandra for many years, and she was a very big early influence on the development of his technique.

Soon younger musicians, some still students at music conservatories, were studying with Glen. Among the first were Eva Atsalis, N. Scott Robinson, Jan Hagiwara, Ed Brunicardi, Randy Crafton, Yousif Sheronick, and Glen Fittin, who all performed with *Handdance*. Richard Graham and John Wieczorek were also early students of Glen's. John performed as a guest artist in my ensembles in later years and traveled with me throughout Turkey, Syria, Greece, and Cyprus researching the history of the frame drum.

Around 1983, Steve Gorn,<sup>15</sup> the brilliant *bansuri* flutist (North Indian bamboo flute), joined Glen and me to perform with *Handdance* (see accompanying video: "Drala"). At times this group was joined by John Loose, Eva Atsalis, N. Scott Robinson, and Jan Hagiwara adding percussion, and with Eva occasionally playing her first instrument, violin (see accompanying video, "Handdance Drum Ensemble"). Over the years, well-known soloists



Alessandra Belloni

John Clark, Art Baron, Larry Karush, and Howard Levy were guest performers with *Handdance*.

An important early fusion frame drummer who we were around a lot was John Bergamo,<sup>16</sup> percussionist and teacher at Cal Arts in Valencia, California. John studied *tabla* with Mahaparush Misra, Shankar Ghosh, and Swapan Chaudhuri, and South Indian drumming with T.H. Subashchandan, T.H. Vinayakram, T. Rang-



Steve Gorn and Layne Redmond from the video "Drala."



Handdance Trio: Steve Gorn, Glen Velez, Layne Redmond.

nathan, Poovalur Srinivasan, and P.S. Venkatesan. Inspired by Glen's work he began his own investigations into synthesizing hand drumming techniques for the frame drum, creating a style he taught to his students at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). John pioneered percussion-based compositions with the ensemble



John Bergamo

Repercussion Unit and kept evolving his ideas with a later group, *Hands On'semble*.<sup>17</sup> Even though John has retired, *Hands On'semble* continues to expand the world of frame drumming fusion.

Jamey Haddad has been another important player of the frame drum and an incredibly dedicated, generous, and beloved teacher. Jamey's parents were from Lebanon and he grew up in Cleveland simultaneously playing the Arabic *doumbek* and a drum-

kit. He played folkloric music with his relatives at family celebrations but also learned to play Motown music and Stevie Wonder tunes. Later, after concentrating heavily on jazz as a drumset player, he began studying South Indian *kanjira* with Ramnad Raghavan and then received a Fulbright Fellowship, enabling him to study percussion in South India. Although he studied traditionally he was very involved with creating a fusion of techniques and rhythmic ideas, and he created the Hadjini ceramic hand drum. He also developed interesting fusion frame drums with the Cooperman Drum and Fife Company. Today he plays with Paul Simon, Dave Liebman, the Paul Winter Consort, and Broadway actress and singer Betty Buckley. In the world music scene he plays with violinist Simon Shaheen, the Assad Brothers (Brazilian guitarists), and South Indian master percussionist Trichy Sankaran, among many others. Jamey teaches at Berklee College of Music, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and Cleveland Institute of Music.<sup>18</sup>

Although Glen had worked with the split-hand technique from South Indian drumming since the very beginning of his fusion of frame drum techniques, Jamey was my *kanjira* teacher, and he set me on a very special path when he made me practice *kanjira* to the Sergio Mendes classic CD *Brasileiro*, for which I am so very grateful! This love of Brazilian music would eventually lead me to move to Brazil.

These three master fusion percussionists—Glen Velez, John Bergamo, and Jamey Haddad—were the original western teachers of many of the frame drummers now playing professionally in the United States, and through their videos, concerts, and workshops they have influenced percussionists the world over.

## INSTRUMENTS

When we first started playing, frame drums were hard to come by in the United States. Glen and I even traveled to Morocco to hear music and score some *bendir*s—frame drums with a buzzing snare. We used to put a warning on our recordings that the buzzing was the drum and not the listener's speaker. I made three trips to Egypt for research into the ancient traditions and to get professional fishskin *riqs* from Mohamed Ali Street in Cairo. Cooperman Fife and Drum Company had been manufacturing high quality natural-skin *bodhrans*, and one of these drums became Glen's primary sitting position frame drum.

In the early '80s, Remo Belli, of Remo, Inc., inspired by Glen's playing at a PASIC clinic, created a line of frame drums under Glen's direction. This was the beginning of the easily accessible supply of frame drums with synthetic heads. By 2000, Remo had become the major player in creating world percussion instruments in the United States. Remo developed the first line of Signature Series frame drums with Glen Velez, John Bergamo, myself, and Alessandra Belloni.

## RECORDINGS AND VIDEOS

In 1983 Bob Haddad recorded *Handdance* with Glen and me. Glen re-

corded solos on a *pandero* (Spanish frame drum), a *pandeiro* (Brazilian tambourine), and a *bodhran* (Irish frame drum). We did two duets and also included a 21-minute suite of frame drumming, "In Transit," which we had performed live in 1983 at the new music concert space, Roulette, in New York. *Handdance* was the first of a new series of world-fusion recordings for Bob's company, Music of the World. I believe this was the first new music recording based on the frame drum.

In 1985, through the interest and enthusiasm of the percussionist and set drummer Mark Nauseef, Kurt Renker of CMP Records brought Glen and me to Germany to record *Internal Combustion*. Glen recorded three solos, one on *bodhran*, one on *riq* (Middle Eastern tambourine), and one on *doira* (Afghani tambourine) and *adufe* (double-headed square frame drum from Northern Spain with bells inside between the heads). *Internal Combustion* included two duets: "Bendir" on Moroccan *bendir*s with the buzzing snares, and "Internal Combustion" on two *gavals*. On "Bendir" we pitched our overtone singing to the drone of the buzzing drums. (See accompanying video, "Bendir.")

"Internal Combustion" is a great cued and improvisational composition for two frame drums that has a basic cycle of two rhythms in ten, a rhythm in nine, and a rhythm in eight, creating a 37-beat cycle felt over a pulse of four. At any time Glen could give me a cue to go to a section in seven, nine, six, etc. I would continue playing that time signature until the cue to return to the cycle. Glen explains all this on an excerpt from *The Fantastic World of Frame Drums* (see accompanying video clip, "Internal Combustion").

I don't know exactly when "Internal Combustion" came into being. It evolved out of hours of practicing together, but we did record it in 1985. I fell in love with these experiments in odd-time cycles and have continued to work with them up to the present day.

In 1990, I composed "Uma," which was built on a 36-beat cycle consisting of rhythmic groups played sequentially in the following order: eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one (repeat entire cycle); the cycle goes on continuously throughout the piece. A melodic drone (with a modal movement) sung by several voices is set to a descending Phrygian scale (a scale specifically associated with the ancient frame drums from Greece and what is now Turkey) tied to the rhythmic cycle of 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. A 9-beat part for flute is played four times against this 36-beat cycle, and a 6-beat part for violin is played six times against the cycle. I composed the melody and harmony against this drone, flute, and violin parts over the 36-beat cycle. (See accompanying video "Uma.")

In 1995 Garry Kvistad commissioned me to create "Trance Formation" for his Woodstock Beat concert to be performed by Bob Becker, Tommy Brunjes, Stacey Bowers, Russ Hartenberger, Garry Kvistad, Rick Kvistad, and myself. This is a further evolution of the ideas I explored in "Uma," based on a cycle of 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, creating a 45-beat cycle. There was a repeating rhythm in five that was played nine times, a part in nine played five times, and a part that alternated between a rhythm in eight and



Layne Redmond in the video "Bendir"



Layne Redmond and Glen Velez from the video *The Fantastic World of Frame Drums*



The Mob of Angels from the video “Uma”

seven, played three times. I give a more complete explanation right before we perform it in the accompanying video clip from “Trance Formation.”

Glen, Steve Gorn, and I recorded *Seven Heaven* for CMP records in 1987. We used a number of different types of frame drums on this recording plus mbira (African finger piano), shakers, Thai goblet drum, Filipino buzz sticks, and a wooden frame drum, and Steve played bansuri bamboo flutes. *Seven Heaven* featured the music our trio performed during this period. In 1989, Glen, Steve, John Clark, Howard Levy, and I recorded *Assyrian Rose* for CMP. This album marked the mature presentation of Glen’s compositional skills and his choice of great improvising melodic soloists.

In 1990, Garry Kvistad of Woodstock Chimes, who performed with Glen in the Steve Reich Ensemble, created the video *Drumbeats*, the first frame drum instructional video, which was eventually sold to Remo, Inc. Several years ago I saw it for sale in a music store with a sign that said “Vintage Glen Velez and Layne Redmond”!

At the 1988 Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), Gerry James was inspired by the playing of Glen, John Bergamo, Trichy Sankaran, and Jamey Haddad in a hotel room jam session. He founded Interworld Music and created a series of frame drum instructional videos and began a series of percussion-based recordings. The first video, released in 1990, was *The Fantastic World of Frame Drums* by Glen that featured “Internal Combustion” and a tambourine duet we performed regularly. Interworld released John Bergamo’s *The Art & Joy of Hand Drumming* in 1990 and *Finding Your Way with Hand Drums* in 1991. Also in 1991, Interworld released my video, *Ritual Drumming*. When Warner Bros. licensed the video catalog from Interworld, they changed the name to *A Sense of Time*. These videos and recordings functioned to spread the awareness of frame drumming and make it accessible to far more people than could be reached by the few teachers at



“Trance Formation,” composed by Layne Redmond, performed by Bob Becker, Tommy Be, Stacey Bowers, Russ Hartenberger, Garry Kvistad, Rick Kvistad, and Layne Redmond, Woodstock Beat concert, 1995

that time. Glen and John’s videos were created for percussionists interested in learning a new style of drumming. My video was created for people who had never drummed before.

We had no idea at the time how the influence of these videos would spark frame drum traditions here in the United States and all over the world. In 2007, I went to Cairo to meet one of my favorite frame drummers, Fredrik Gille. Fredrik introduced me to young Egyptian percussionists familiar with me from *The Fantastic World of Frame Drums* video. It seemed that Glen’s video had been passed from drummers in Jordan to drummers in Egypt. I was poignantly touched that these traditional players whose culture had inspired Glen were now inspired by the work we had done.

Gerry James was also developing frame drums with Cooperman to accompany the instructional videos he was recording with Glen, John, me, and others. Randy Crafton, in conjunction with Cooperman, took over the direction of the frame drum manufacturing from Gerry with his company, Crafton Percussion Works, and then eventually sold his share to Cooperman. From the beginning of Randy’s “frame drum fever,” he was full of inspired and effective energy, throwing himself wholeheartedly into playing, creating drums and instructional materials, making CDs, and organizing workshops. From around 1995 to 2000, Randy was on the PAS World Percussion committee and made sure that the frame drum was well represented at PAS events and in PAS publications in those years, bringing it further into the mainstream of the percussion world.

In 1991, Glen’s recording *Ramana* for Music of the World was released with Jan Hagiwara, Howard Levy, and myself. In that same year, Glen took his troupe of frame drummers, Eva Atsalis, Ed Brunicardi, Randy Crafton, and Jan Hagiwara and flutist Steve Gorn to Germany to record *Doctrine of Signatures* for CMP Records. Throughout the 1990s Glen continued to record under his own name with various configurations of frame players and melodic soloists. He also appeared on many other bandleaders’ albums and is recognized as one of the most important percussionists of his time. By the beginning of the new millennium many of Glen’s students were teaching, recording, and creating instructional materials; the contemporary development of a frame drumming tradition in the U.S. was well underway.

The mid-’70s through the mid-’90s saw the initial development of an original style of frame drumming in the United States along with research into its ancient history and the development of companies manufacturing frame drums, creating instructional videos, and releasing new music based on this instrument. Initially all of this evolved out of Glen’s endless hours of exploring various frame drum techniques and the influence of various rhythms on his own sensibility, giving rise to the development of his solos on various frame drums. When I began studying with him, we spent hours just playing the frame drums together. Our duo drumming compositions evolved out of these hours and hours of explorations. When Steve Gorn joined us, our trio rehearsed for two or more hours, three times a week exploring rhythmic and melodic structures. The Handdance percussion ensemble also met for frequent extended rehearsals conducted by Glen’s auditory rhythmic cues with very few breaks for verbal instructions. These timeless hours of intensive exploration of frame drumming, odd-time cycles, and the melodic structures arising out of the overtones of the drums gave birth to so much of the music that was eventually recorded under Glen’s direction.

## ON MY OWN

My nine years of studying, performing, and recording with Glen (1981–90) had been an incredibly fruitful and exciting time for me, but in the fall of 1990, I left the Handdance groups to follow my own musical ideas, and Randy Crafton admirably replaced me in the trio with Glen and Steve; Yousif Sheronick, Jan Hagiwara, Eva Atsalis, Glen Fittin, and Randy were now the regulars in the Handdance percussion ensemble.

In the late 1980s at the end of the concerts I did with Glen and Steve, I began speaking about the frame drum’s incredible history. The response was overwhelming. After each concert, women would approach me to ask if I would teach them to drum. Although most of them had never seen a frame drum before, they felt an overwhelming urge to learn its rhythms. Soon I had more than 50 students a week studying frame drum.

Out of these dedicated students I put together my first drumming ensemble, the Mob of Angels, and we were often joined by Steve Gorn on flute, Amitava Chatterjee on voice and guitar, and Vicki Richards on violin. In 1991, this configuration of the Mob of Angels recorded *Since the Beginning* for Interworld Music. I've just re-mixed this in Brazil and will soon make it available for download.

One track in particular, "Nubian Maracatu," is a fusion of one of the first rhythms I learned from a Hamza El Din<sup>19</sup> album, *Waterwheel*, a rhythm often identified as "Ollin Azageed."<sup>20</sup> I was able to organize one workshop for Hamza to teach, and his influence has been very inspirational to me, particularly his teaching on the connection of the elements: earth, water, fire, and air to the individual strokes on the frame drum. The arrangement of "Nubian Maracatu" combines the rhythm I learned from Hamza, "Ollin Azageed," on the tar with the maracatu rhythm from Pernambuco, Brazil played by Bahian percussionists: Ubaldo Oliveira on berimbau and Everton Isidoro on pandeiro, all of it tuned to the drone of windwands (a type of bullroarer). The three of us then overdubbed the traditional Nubian handclapping of "Ollin Azageed," and Tadeu Mascarenhas added his funky synth bass (hear accompanying audio file, "Nubian Maracatu").

In 1994, I met the multi-instrumentalist Tommy Brunjes (aka Tommy Be), who had been touring with the pop band PM Dawn, when he came to study the frame drum with me. From the very first our frame drumming together just clicked and we began a partnership that produced a series of recordings, teaching materials, and performances that lasted until 2004. Our CD *Trance Union* is one of my most pirated CDs, so I know that it has hit a chord with those who love frame drum music! We were also extremely surprised and grateful when *Drum!* magazine readers voted it Percussion CD of the Year for two years in a row—something I never imagined would happen. (See accompanying videos, "Seven Sent" and "Rattlesnake.")

But I never could have imagined how my life would unfold because of the tambourine—particularly when in 1995, Nana Vasconcelos invited me to perform as a soloist in the Second Annual PercPan Festival in Salvador in the state of Bahia, Brazil.<sup>21</sup> Nana brought percussionists and groups from all over the world including Gilberto Gil, Milton Nascimento, Los Munequitos de Matanzas from Cuba, La Calenda from Uruguay, Adama Drame from Africa, and many others for five days of concerts and workshops. This was a total life-changing experience for me from so many different angles. The beautiful city of Salvador hums and pulses with the best live music I've ever heard, and the workshops with the other percussionists were amazing, only to be outdone by the evening concerts in the festival. But walking out on the stage to do a tambourine solo after listening to Milton Nascimento sing my favorite song of his, "Chamada," backed by the great drummer Robertinho Silva and his two sons, Ronaldo and Vanderei, took every bit of nerve and courage I could scrape together. I've found that sometimes bravery is more important than anything else in your career—and particularly not focusing on whether or not a tambourine solo could possibly hold up to what just occurred on the stage!



Layne Redmond from the video "Seven Sent"



Tommy Be and Layne Redmond

In 1997 my book, *When the Drummers Were Women*, was published, documenting the ancient history of the frame drum. The root of this history was initially based on Glen's research compiled in the mid 1970s mostly from sources in the New York Public Library. Throughout the '80s and the early '90s I traveled extensively through the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe researching the history of the frame drum in museums and on temple walls. Plus I spent years in the New York Public Research Library. I remember one exhausting day at the library wondering if I could ever complete this book, thinking how easy it would just be to give this project up. Altogether I spent about 15 years working on the research and writing. I guess enduring persistence has to be paired with courage!

Both Glen's initial research and my further intensive travel and research revealed that the earliest drummers in the Mediterranean world were primarily women, most often priestesses and musicians connected to religious traditions playing liturgical music in the temples or in ritual processions, celebrations, or mystery rites. Glen had written several short articles in the mid-'80s noting this and that many of the ancient frame drummers were identified as goddesses: Aphrodite, Isis, Hathor, Cybele, and Inanna along with the Egyptian god Bes and Greek god Dionysos. We also determined that many of the images were of priestesses and that the frame drum was often the emblem of their position in the religious hierarchy. The oldest named drummer in history is the High Priestess Lipushua, who presided over the temple of the Moon God, Nanna, in the city state of Ur, in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) circa 2300 B.C.E. She conducted the liturgy with a small round frame drum called the Balag-di. And Miriam, who played the timbrel or toph (frame drum, often translated as tambourine, but I feel that her frame drum probably did not have jingles), is the only named drummer in the Christian Bible: "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances" (Exodus 15:20). Archaeological evidence shows the earliest percussion instruments to be frame drum, barrel drum, sistrums, clappers, and small hand cymbals. We see the frame drum primarily in women's hands, but the barrel drum in Egypt was played by women at court banquets and in the military by men.

*When the Drummers Were Women* was published by Random House in English and distributed in the U.S., Canada, England, and Australia. It was also published in German, in Persian in Iran, and will be published in Dutch in the Netherlands in 2012. Currently we are revising it as an E-book with many video links to frame drumming traditions around the world and in the U.S.

I've always been extremely interested in the ancient music from the Mediterranean world and inspired by the images and texts describing the

rituals of the ancient frame drummers. With my students I formed the Mob of Angels in 1990. We set out to revive the ancient Mediterranean tradition of women's ceremonial drumming. Although I have studied and listened to many contemporary traditions of frame drumming, I neither copied those traditions nor tried to recreate what I thought women might have played. The frame drum is the central instrument around which I compose, but I have also integrated other ancient and modern acoustic instruments into my compositions. My aim is to create a contemporary new music that is non-traditional but pulses with the rhythms of an archaic language. (See accompanying video, "Mob of Angels.")

Since 2005, I've been traveling to the Greek side of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus to teach a group of dedicated students to play the frame drum. The indigenous tradition of frame drumming in the Greek Cypriot area appears to have died out in the latter half of the 20th century, yet the archaeological record shows that from c.1500 B.C.E. until approximately 500 C.E., the women of ancient Cyprus were renowned frame drummers. After finding my book, *When the Drummers Were Women*, which includes a chapter on these ancient Cypriot drummers, a group formed to bring me there to teach workshops. A band of serious students have continued their studies with master percussionist Zohar Fresco, who travels from Israel several times a year to expand their studies. In 2007, I joined Zohar with the core group of



Image from 5th century B.C.E. Greek vase c. 900 B.C.E. Phoenician sculpture



Layne Redmond and Zohar Fresco

these drummers for a concert attended by the ambassador from Israel and officials from the Cypriot Culture of Ministry. Playing with Zohar was an amazing experience; his technique is fabulous and he's an incredibly generous and supportive player and one of the most innovative contemporary frame drummers. (See accompanying video, "Layne Redmond and Zohar Fresco.")

Totally inspired by my Cypriot experiences, I began a new recording project in Brazil, *Invoking Aphrodite*, using ancient Greek texts chanted by the women drummers of Cyprus. The title piece, "Invoking Aphrodite," is the ancient poem, c. 7th century B.C.E. by the great poet Sappho, composer and priestess of Aphrodite, and one of the most popular lyricists in the Greek-speaking world. We recorded two of the oldest surviving notated musical compositions, "The Hymn to the Muse," written by Mesomedes of Crete in 147 C.E., and "The Epitaph of Seikilos," engraved on a tombstone around 300 B.C.E., and we set other ancient hymns to new compositions created for the project. Most of the musical tracks were recorded in Salvador, Brazil, while the women of Cyprus chanted the ancient Greek in a studio in Cyprus, and through the magic of the Internet we downloaded it into our studio in Brazil. Once again my old collaborators Steve Gorn and Tommy Be also contributed via the Internet, and Vicki Richards flew down and recorded with us live in Brazil. (Hear accompanying audio file of "The Epitaph of Seikilos.")

In 2004 I began a series of visits to Brazil that eventually led me to move to Salvador. Here in this magically musical city I have been a volunteer teacher at the percussion department at UFBA, the federal university, and also at the music school, Escola Pracatum in Candeal, founded by one of my heroes, percussionist/pop star Carlinhos Brown, who was born in this poor but very special neighborhood.

Out of my classes at UFBA I developed a core group of dedicated students of the frame drum who were also interested in combining their traditional percussion with what I was doing on the tambourine. Through the drummers I was introduced to Tadeu Mascarenhas, a young recording engineer, producer, and wonderful keyboard player, who has become my invaluable co-producer on the four projects I've recorded in Salvador.

Our first recording project, *The Wave of Bliss*, fused many of the Mediterranean-influenced rhythms I was teaching with Bahian rhythms. I would choose the basic rhythm the frame drum would play and then the five percussionists would decide what instruments and parts they would play, and then we would record live without a click track or separation. On some of the pieces Tadeu improvised live with us on keyboards. Later, Tadeu and I would decide from listening to the melodies we heard in the overtones of the percussion which direction to go in melodically with a singer, guitar, and further keyboards. "Whirled Jam," from this project, is an Armenian-influenced rhythm in ten over Bahian samba with the surdo holding down the basic 2/4 samba meter. The agogo bell is playing a rhythm in five, and the guitarist brought a reggae lilt to it all. (Hear accompanying audio file, "Whirled Jam.")



Mob of Angels



From the moment I started spending time in Brazil I've been drawn more and more into the world of musical film making and video documentation. From the very first of my playing with Glen, many of our performances were videotaped. I had that first shocking experience of seeing myself on camera back in the early '80s! I immediately began to learn how to be a more effective player and performer from watching these videos and am now very fortunate to have an archive of footage that stretches back to the mid-'80s.

These days I almost see myself more as a filmmaker than a frame drummer. Although I am still creating instructional DVDs of my own work (see accompanying video, "Three styles of frame drumming instruction") and editing DVDs on the Bahian pandeiro and Egyptian tambourines, I was captivated by the atabaque drums used in *candomblé* in Salvador and the matrix they provide to call forth the songs, dance, and mythology of the *Orixás*, the Afro-Brazilian deities. It is thought that the drums provide the vortex of energy for the deities to descend into the initiates. I have just finished producing a recording of seven traditional *candomblé* songs using some of the greatest musicians in Salvador.

Over the years I have heard many recordings of *candomblé*, but this project is unique in that I've hired the best musicians who grew up in the tradition and recorded in one of the top studios in Salvador. I've also encouraged Mariella Santiago, one of the lead vocalists, to improvise and create innovative vocal arrangements for the chants. I placed the drums up much louder in the mix than is customary. (But I've done that on all my recordings,

giving them a unique sound. I have always been frustrated by how low percussion is mixed on many projects.) My personal experience in a *candomblé* ceremony in a *terreiro*, the ritual house where ceremonies take place, is that the sound of the drums is the core of the experience, and I wanted that to come through on a recording—I wanted the listener to hear what I heard in the *terreiro*.

This past September I completed shooting video footage for the seven *Orixás* so that each song will have a music video. "Iemanjá," the great primordial ocean mother, the cosmic womb of all things, the goddess of the sea, is complete but unreleased, so readers of *Percussive Notes* will be the first to view this short film. The drummers and some of the singers and dancers in the video perform with Balé Folclórico da Bahia, the internationally renowned troupe based in Salvador. Lead vocalist is Mariella Santiago and the dancer is Rosangela Silvestre. (See accompanying video, "Iemanjá.")

I've also been working on videos to go with the music I've recorded on my CDs. Everyone, from individual artists to orchestral ensembles, realize that video is in many ways the future of how music will reach a worldwide audience and develop sustaining financial support. Many organizations are in the process of creating structures to broadcast concerts or pre-recorded musical events, through streaming media, or distribute through Vimeo, YouTube, Link TV, live Internet radio and video broadcasting, or Internet-based webcasting stations. Although watching video on your monitor will never replace the immensity of experiencing live music, it is probably the future distribution network for music as LPs, cassettes, and CDs were in the past.

As I put together this review of where the tambourine has taken me in the last 30 years, I've noticed the profound role that PASIC and *Percussive Notes* have played in my life and in planting the frame drum culture here in America. The early PASIC clinics of Glen Velez, John Bergamo, Jamey Haddad, and Trichy Sankaran inspired Remo Belli and Cooperman to manufacture frame drums, and also inspired Gerry James to create frame drum instructional videos, and exposed so many more percussionists to these traditions. As *Percussive Notes* moves into providing videos and media online, this will serve to fertilize and accelerate the interconnectedness of percussionists worldwide. This can only be a great thing, leading to as yet unforeseen fusions of techniques and rhythms and greater human understanding of all our rhythmic cultures.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Standing in the Shadows of Motown* clip: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpy2nuBfdMk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpy2nuBfdMk)
2. Neighborhood gatherings of musicians: <http://youtu.be/Nkcv9ypdse8>
3. Music in School and Temple in the Ancient Near East: [http://www.caeno.org/newagain\\_files/sitewide/papers/Krispijn\\_MesopotamianMusic\\_Slides.pdf](http://www.caeno.org/newagain_files/sitewide/papers/Krispijn_MesopotamianMusic_Slides.pdf)
4. Sachs, Curt: *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*. [www.archive.org/details/TheRiseOfMusicInTheAncientWorld](http://www.archive.org/details/TheRiseOfMusicInTheAncientWorld)
5. *The Cure Women* (online documentary): [www.cultureunplugged.com/play/3425/The-Cure-Women--Marzavan-](http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/3425/The-Cure-Women--Marzavan-)



Students of Escola Pracatum, Candeal, Brazil 2006



Wave of Bliss band





Rosangela Silvestre from the video "Iemanjá"

6. "A Short History of the Frame Drum" by Layne Redmond, *Percussive Notes*, vol. 34 no. 5, October 1996. <http://publications.pas.org/archive/oct96/articles/9610.69-72.pdf>
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8. N. Scott Robinson's kanjira page: [www.nscottrobinson.com/southindiaperc.php](http://www.nscottrobinson.com/southindiaperc.php)
9. Gaval information: UNESCO sponsored Azerbaijan State Museum of musical Culture, [www.musicmuseum.az/en/index.php?id=0411](http://www.musicmuseum.az/en/index.php?id=0411)
10. Music of the World Records: <http://musicoftheworld.com>
11. CMP Records: [www.artist-shop.com/cmp](http://www.artist-shop.com/cmp)
12. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY0ff8u5BvQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY0ff8u5BvQ)
13. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwAYXJVJKzQ&feature=share>
14. Alessandra Belloni: [www.alessandrabelloni.com](http://www.alessandrabelloni.com)
15. Steve Gorn: [www.stevegorn.com](http://www.stevegorn.com)
16. "John Bergamo: Percussion World View," by N. Scott Robinson, *Percussive Notes*,

vol. 39, no. 1 (February 2001): 8–17, <http://publications.pas.org/archive/feb01/articles/0102.08-17.pdf>

17. Video of Hands On' Semble with John Bergamo: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_AKb42bWf6E&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_AKb42bWf6E&feature=youtu.be)
18. Jamey Haddad with Matt Kilmer playing pandeiro with a fusion of Arabic tambourine and South Indian kanjira techniques: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1caDrZV1wbo&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1caDrZV1wbo&feature=related)
19. Hamza El Din: [www.hamzaeldin.com](http://www.hamzaeldin.com)
20. Hamza El Din playing the "Ollin Azageed" rhythm: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCB6Nil3eiE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCB6Nil3eiE)
21. "Second Annual PercPan Festival," [www.layneredmond.com/Publications\\_files/Second%20Annual%20PercPan%20Festival%20in%20Salvador%20-%20by%20Layne.pdf](http://www.layneredmond.com/Publications_files/Second%20Annual%20PercPan%20Festival%20in%20Salvador%20-%20by%20Layne.pdf)

## LINKS

Layne Redmond: [www.LayneRedmond.com](http://www.LayneRedmond.com)

Layne Redmond YouTube channels: [www.youtube.com/framedrummer](http://www.youtube.com/framedrummer) and [www.youtube.com/hatnofer](http://www.youtube.com/hatnofer)

North American Frame Drum Association (NAFDA): [www.nafda1.com/](http://www.nafda1.com/)

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