

THE BEAT OF LIFE: **MORWEN AND JIMI TWO FEATHERS**

BY BETH SURDUT

"IF YOU MUST JUDGE ME, I ASK THAT YOU JUDGE MY HEART, AND DO SO WITH YOURS OPEN. IT IS MY HIGHEST PRAYER THAT WE MAY LEARN AND GROW TOGETHER, AND THAT ALL OUR EFFORTS UNITE IN SERVICE TO HEALING AND PEACE." MORWEN TWO FEATHERS

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Primal, mesmerizing and exhilarating, drumming with the Earth Drum Council is a cross-cultural party for the body and spirit. Add a fire to dance around, as EDC co-founder Jimi Two Feathers has done for various local communities, and people of all ages and ethnicities show up. "Humans walk, breathe, have a heartbeat — we are basically rhythmic beings, and drumming taps into that," says Jimi, who began drumming on Boston Common as a teenager. His youth rocked with the sounds of Hendrix and Joplin, and the western cultural Mecca was Woodstock. His adulthood rolls with a message of anti-racism and spiritual energy.

He sits, or rather wriggles with intensity in his chair in the Concord office of EDC. He has just returned from one of his teaching gigs at a local high school, where at the request of the school psychologist he developed a program for students with special needs. Dyslexic himself, he finds drumming and dancing transcend traditional boundaries. He is not alone in his beliefs. The *Fire Circles* he has built with his partner Morwen Two Feathers, in affiliation with the group Because We Care in Acton-Boxborough, brought out parents and teens who dug up sod, piled on the wood, then drummed and danced before making the fire disappear by replacing the sod. The couple participates in First Night in Worcester and Boston, in the Musketaquid Earth Day Parade, and coordinated gatherings and conferences.

Drum and Dance, a gathering facilitated by Jimi and Morwen, meets twice a month in Cambridge. All skill levels are welcome and there are plenty of stories of the delighted surprises that await people who think they can't dance or drum. An average of twenty-five regulars and as many as seventy people show up to participate in rhythms born in Africa, Asia, Ireland, Europe, and the melting pot that is the United States. Approximately half come to dance; half come to drum. The drummers lay down beats for each other, for the dancers, for the unity of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Morwen has developed her own style of ecstatic dance, permutations of which can be found in many countries. A strong drummer



with degrees in psychology and sociology, she talks about her own experiences.

"When I'm drumming I'm conscious of the responsibility I have to the dancers and the other drummers. There's a sense of my personal ego boundaries disappearing and becoming part of a whole. When I'm dancing I can completely abandon myself and fly. It's just my body and the rhythm."

Jimi adds his perspective. "To me it feels like you're winding up to start a cycle of flying and floating. A lot of the culture has lost that spiritual state, that communion with yourself and your spiritual energy."

Sitting with the Two Feathers is like a watching a ping pong match where the ball never hits the floor. They came from different backgrounds—Morwen, who chose a name not bestowed upon her by her Jewish parents of Eastern European ancestry, and Jimi, a mixture of African-American, Wampanoag, and European. Agreeing, adding, and exulting; together they organize councils, meetings of elders from shamanic cultures that form what the Two Feathers call the Sacred Hoop. The council that met in October 2000 melded the old values of tribal cultures,

sciousness. There was a growth in white people's interest in African drumming along with controversy as to whether whites had the right to drum. Also, in traditional cultures the women often were not drummers. Teachers would take our money and then ignore us. We wanted to create a safe space for people to drum and dance together," said Morwen. They formed a Sister-Brother Circle that allowed men and women to drum separately and then join together.

EDC sponsors internationally known drummers to come to the Boston area to teach—Yaya Diallo, Tony Vacca, and Bonnie Devlin, the only woman to be initiated as a Haitian Voodoo drum master. The upcoming event March 2-4, *Off the Beat and Pulse*, includes a performance and three days with Reinhard and Cornelia Flatischler, an Austrian team who have developed the Ta Ke Ti Na Rhythm Workshop. Reinhard, a composer, percussionist and author, has travelled the world to learn indigenous drumming techniques that have culminated in his developing a unique process of teaching. "He overloads the left brain till it shuts down and lets the holistic right one take over," said Morwen, who had first read

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including processes from early European councils, along with conflict resolution and teambuilding techniques. Jimi uses some of these same procedures with teenagers.

"Everybody has a piece of the truth. We wanted them to come together," said Jimi, whose Native American contacts told him they do not sit in council with whites, but did finally join the group of nineteen representatives from the symbolic five colors of black, white, red, yellow and brown. "Where do we go from here? How do we build a future as a multicultural society? How do we mend the Sacred Hoop?" were the questions addressed.

"My real work is around internal racism. Inappropriate behavior doesn't know color. Issues between men and women, racism—they're all parallels of the same human sickness, of things being out of balance."

So we come full circle to some of the reasons Morwen and Jimi formed the Earth Drum Council in 1990.

"Drumming was just coming into con-

his book *The Forgotten Power of Rhythm* and was then serendipitously contacted by his agent to produce the only East Coast workshop. Ta Ke Ti Na is described as rhythm for evolution, a method for developing rhythmic competence and creativity in all styles of music for both professional musicians and beginners. People may attend only the performance and, if they are so inspired by it, sign up for the workshop immediately thereafter. "Sometimes I think the reason so many of us are so captivated by drumming is that our parents and teachers told us so many times as children to 'stop that racket!' and now we can make all the noise we want," wrote Morwen in her 1995 essay, *Why Drum?*

"We are not 'Master' anything. We're just like everybody else," Jimi explained. Just like everybody else with a social conscience and a delight in the dance of body and spirit.

For more information, visit earthdrum.com, call Earth Drum Council at 978-371-2502 or Email edc@earthdrum.com