

A HEART TO DRUM

‘Remarkable and ground-breaking initiative – listen, learn, and worship through it.’

*Jeremy Begbie, Associate Principal, Ridley Hall,
Cambridge; Professor of Theology,
University of St Andrews*

‘*The Message* version of Psalm 66 encourages us to “set glory to the rhythms of His praise”. Terl Bryant and the Psalm Drummers do just the same.’

Matt Redman, lead worshipper/songwriter

‘In a global culture where rhythm is the soundtrack to millions of lives, I believe that the vision and ministry of Psalm Drummers is a powerful sign of God’s heartbeat for redemption.’

Graham Kendrick, worship leader/songwriter

‘Psalm Drummers combine the raw power of the ancient skill of percussion with a spiritual heart cry from deep within.’

Stewart Smith, drummer with Delirious?

‘There is a new musical sound being birthed whose foundation is on ancient and traditional instruments. The heartbeat of this expression is the indigenous drum.’

Martin Neil, drummer, percussionist, producer

‘Psalm Drummers bring a wonderfully exciting dimension to the joy, simplicity and compassion of knowing and praising God. The Psalms urge us to participate in the vast harmonious order that God has created, where all are called to sing the praises of the Almighty.’

John Sentamu, Archbishop of York

A Heart to Drum

For Psalm Drummers everywhere

TERL BRYANT



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The Voice of Drums



James Blades (1901–1999), the popular British percussionist and professor of percussion at London’s Royal Academy of Music, was responsible for the sound of the gong at the beginning of the J. Arthur Rank movies. He also created the ‘V-for-Victory’ Morse code signal that was broadcast by the BBC during World War Two 150 times a day. The recording echoed the ‘da-da-da-dum’ phrase that begins Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. He was quoted as saying, ‘That was the greatest noise I ever made.’

I’ve heard comments like the following many times:

- ‘The drums are just there to hold down a solid rhythm to support the music.’

- 'I've never really thought that drums did more than keep the beat.'
- 'Drumming is a primitive art form.'

These comments are short-sighted: the drummer can bring much more – and not only things that we can see or hear. I believe you can 'speak' with your drums. You can express yourself in clear and tangible ways through the sounds you make with your instruments. You are a creative being, made in the image of God. He speaks through all He has made, and so can you.

Hear attentively the thunder of His voice, and the rumbling that comes from His mouth. . . God thunders marvellously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend.
(Job 37:2, 5)

God's words are heard as a whisper or a shout, a song or a sound. They are heard deep within the heart and audibly in creation. Your drumming can also be a voice through which you speak, and it can follow the example of the way God speaks. This is sometimes called playing prophetically.

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder.

(Revelation 14:2)

It is true that God is deeply mysterious and there is so much we don't understand about Him. However, He also makes things plainly simple when we are prepared to open our hearts and search the Scriptures. It is through His Word that we grow in wisdom and understanding, and learn how He communicates.

The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display His marvellous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies; yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world.

(Psalm 19:1–4, NLT)

Do you remember in Chapter 3 how we saw that God's Word calls us to play with *sakal* – which means with wisdom and insight? *The Cambridge Dictionary* says that 'insight' means '...a clear,

deep and sometimes sudden understanding of a complicated problem or situation’.

God’s Word does not only appear as a spoken language; it is heard in the sounds of creation. Other sounds carry God’s voice and your drumming can carry your voice too. It can express the words and intent of your heart. This may seem mysterious, but it needn’t be.

There are three very simple ways of viewing this:

1. You can create sounds or rhythmic patterns that have meaning, as in James Blades’ Morse message of victory.
2. Your sounds and rhythm can speak through the atmosphere or mood you create with them. For example, in its simplest form, a fast beat speaks of something hurried, and a slow beat something restful.
3. Your sounds and rhythms can carry the language of your heart and become an expression that speaks to the listener’s heart. This is the language of wisdom and discernment, which is at work in all our communications. You can learn to bring real meaning to the voice of your drumming. As a

listener you are able to differentiate between a genuine or a fake smile, the motive behind a touch, and the honesty of a song. As a player you can develop clarity in what you are able to express.

The first example is the very practical application of the use of your sounds. It might be as obvious as creating a rhythmic motif in a song. Each time it happens it cues a new passage. The music of church bells uses this form of communication. A community could easily recognise the difference between 'a call to worship' and 'a state of emergency'. You can take a word phrase or short passage of Scripture and turn it into a series of rhythmic phrases. It can prompt the listener to the words and meaning and serve to express your voice. A simple way of seeing this work is to tap out the rhythm of a familiar tune or nursery rhyme for a friend, then ask them if they know what you are saying.

In the second example, you can very easily play and also interpret rhythms and sounds based on the pace and feel of them. Although it is not often spelled out in these terms, it is a very obvious

language. Imagine an angry drum pattern: it is loud, intense, 'in your face'. I expect you can easily play it for me. Of course it varies, reflecting all the different ways people can be angry, but you will know what I mean. It's not mysterious at all. The same is true of a peaceful drumbeat. The tempo is slower and is stable and uncluttered. Do you hear it? A march beat is rigid and disciplined, speaking of order and authority, whereas a swung beat or Latin groove speaks of freedom and joy. Think of some other expressions: awe, humour, sadness, chaos. . . It's easy really, isn't it?

This is just the start – simple examples of how you can speak with your drums – but you can go deeper. In the third example, you can bring your natural God-given senses into play. It is something you do all the time as you listen to music, but you can learn to apply it as you play.

The way to do it is to decide what you want to speak, what heartfelt expression you want to bring, and, in faith, go for it. As you practise, it becomes easier and, just like any language, it develops the more you do it. Your discernment and expression develop together.

Using these examples you can play with real focus and intent, causing your ‘drumming words’ to affect the listener and surroundings.

To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

(Ephesians 3:10)

Be very clear: as you drum, you can make the manifold wisdom of God known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. That is to declare God’s sovereignty and the devil’s defeat. It is part of God’s plan that you do this. You can do this with intent and insight, knowing exactly what you are saying with your drums. It is clear from the Bible that many different activities can act as channels for God’s voice and can carry yours too – including your drumming.

Let’s look at the mysterious relationship between the *spoken* word and our drumming voice. The Bible is very clear about the importance of the spoken word:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

(Psalm 19:14)

Sing to Him a new song; play skilfully with a shout of joy. For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth.

(Psalm 33:3–4)

It is a huge area for study and I would suggest that further reading on this subject is essential (see Suggested Reading at the back of this book). However, our grasp of the domain of sound is so often minuscule. Be in no doubt that when we use the Word of God aright in warfare we are assured of victory: 'For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...' (Hebrews 4:12).

We are speaking those words in English because our Bible is in English and that is the language we speak. However, if we were French or Chinese we would declare the Word of God in French or Chinese and we are still assured that the Word of God is alive and full of power! The power and

authority of the Word of God is a supernatural force *within the sounds* of each language as it speaks the Word!

Jesus never spoke English when He was on the earth, but His recorded words in the Bible, in every language, carry supernatural authority. Without God's Spirit and insight, words are merely rhythmic groupings of sound shapes, drumming is just a beat, a conversation is powerless. The more you think about it, it's really extraordinary. Can you see how this relates to your drumming? I hope this helps you grasp something of the rich language you have available in your drumming. I hope it reveals something of the immense diversity of the language of God.

Can you see how your drumming can carry and express the words of your heart? It can carry God's Word that dwells in you, and through the sounds and rhythms you make, it can speak of the things of God. It is a powerful weapon for pulling down strongholds; it is a powerful language that can unify and encourage. If you play from the heart and purpose to bring forth a language of rhythmic words, you will be a significant voice for the Lord.

Your drumming voice is a precious gift. Guard it, invest in it and treat it well. 'Above everything else, guard your heart; for it is the source of life's consequences' (Proverbs 4:23).

Once a year in Northern Ireland the Orangemen take up their drums to march down the infamous Garvaghy Road. The drumming is the language of provocation and is deliberately aggressive. It causes a huge reaction that is heard in the worldwide media each year. For thousands of years men have used the language of drums to strike fear into an enemy. You can speak the language of love, joy, peace and grace through your drumming – and at the right time also strike fear into the enemy! When your heart is aligned with God, you will communicate the things of God through your drumming. When the Spirit of God falls on you, God can and will do extraordinary things through that language.

Remember God's Word in your heart as you play your drums. Think about what He wants you to say. Express it in the tempo, dynamics and feel of the rhythm. Make your beat speak. Let it speak out the Word of God through you. God's Word has limitless

power: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord (Revelation 1:8). 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). God is the beginning and end of all things, the one true defining power.

The Lord Jesus urges us to live in His Word; to respond to it, feed on it and hold it dear to our hearts; to express it through all we do – which means through our drumming too:

My son, attend to my words; consent and submit to my sayings. Let them not depart from your sight; keep them in the centre of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, healing and health to all their flesh.

(Proverbs 4:20–22)

Alex Acuna (world-renowned drummer and percussionist) said this in an interview with Carlos Benson (director of Drummers for Jesus, USA):

One of the greatest men after Jesus was the apostle Paul. When Paul was with the Romans, he spoke like a Roman and when he was with

the Greeks he spoke Greek and when he was with the Jews he spoke Hebrew. God gave in His Word discernment and wisdom, and He prepared us to be in any place. We are going to continue growing in knowledge of being more like Christ if we continue reading the Word and walking by it, walking by faith, walking by victory! But, if we don't do these things, pray and stay in the Word, then the world becomes a challenge to a Christian because they are not fully equipped. When we are fully equipped by the Word of God there is no challenge. That's why God wants some of us to be in the secular business: so we can be a light, we can be salt, we can make a difference, we can be an inspiration to them – not only musically, but spiritually.

Alex understands that God's Word contains all he needs to go anywhere and everywhere that God sends him. His drumming is full of the language of his heart, which in turn is full of God's Word. That is a big part of how he is salt and light in the secular music industry.

There are three things to recap here:

1. God's Word (the Bible) is the absolute truth – God describes Himself and His Word as one.
2. God's Word is not limited to our common language. He speaks in many languages: in words, in sounds, in creation, in visions and through all He has made.
3. You and I are made in His likeness and communicate in many languages: in words, in sounds, through all we make – including drumming.

A young boy's drumming often speaks of passion and excitement, of determination and a desire to be heard. A mature drummer's language has a depth and certainty about it and can speak dynamically in many rhythms. A woman's drumming often carries the language of compassion. Though passionate it remains sensitive – it is very special. One drummer's language might be peaceful and reassuring, while another's will be intense and authoritative. Each has the opportunity to bring something of worth.

Our duty as 'Sound Creators' means that we constantly encourage, share, and reach out

to all those curious enough about this phenomenon.

(Evelyn Glennie)

I had the honour of acting as the facilitator for more than 350 men and women drumming together at a Psalm Drummers gathering in Pennsylvania, USA, in 2002. At one point I signalled for just the women to drum. It was fascinating; the heart of the women brought a sound and voice that was clearly feminine. It had gentleness to it, but great determination, and perhaps most noticeably it danced. It was so stirring. Then when all the boys and men joined in, the beat became war. It was thunderous and very powerful. It was not hard to see why military leaders have used the beat of drums to march to ever since the dawn of time. However, it must be noted that within the Scripture references for drumming it is often the women's drumming that is recorded, offering a beat and rhythm of joy and celebration – welcoming home the armies of the Lord.

Bringing together the understanding of the power of words and the power of drumming can help give

vision and purpose to your playing. Think about who you are in Christ, who He has made you to be. Are you a peacemaker or a warrior? A leader or faithful support? Are you a stabiliser or a challenger? Do you reflect this well in your drumming and have you learned how to express your heart in the words, phrases and language of your drumming?

Drumming is a language through which you can express your worship. Drumming is not a timid expression. It doesn't have to be loud, but it does have to be confident. Each beat carries its comment. A clear, well-defined beat or a well-pronounced rhythm speaks volumes. Understanding the character of the beat or rhythm can seem mysterious, but it needn't be so. When you apply the biblical principles of language to your playing, it becomes easy to express the language of your heart through the sounds of your instruments.

During the time I worked for the band Iona (1991–1998) we often played a piece called 'Kells'. Within the lyrics it declares:

**His Word shall live forever; His Word shall
live forever.**

**The word is a sword that pierces the heart,
The truth is the light that cuts through the
dark of this world.**

**Nations shall rise, nations shall fall,
Nothing shall stand in the way of the Word.**

**Joanne Hogg (from the Iona album
The Book of Kells, Open Sky Records,
© 1992 SGO Music Publishing Ltd)**

It was a powerful and dramatic piece that I felt inspired to play with four drumsticks – two in each hand. I had never done this before, but as I had sought the Lord for the right expression and feel for it, I had a clear image of sharing the drumming with the Lord's angelic forces, and that together we would be battling in the heavenlies. In my spirit I sensed that each thunderous beat was a direct hit against the enemy and as I played I knew I was, with God's anointing, bringing down evil strongholds and allowing His great light to penetrate the darkness – just as the song lyrics announced.

Some years later I was playing at a party in one of London's private gentlemen's clubs. I had been booked to play with a function band, and although I liked the guys in the band, it was not a particularly desirable event. The room was smoky, the sound wasn't great and the inebriated host kept requesting strange tunes that nobody knew. In truth, I was wondering why on earth I was there. After the second forty-five-minute set I went outside to get some fresh air. It was a relief. The London air was cool and I stood for a while watching the black cabs and the bustle of the city.

A few partygoers were wandering in and out, and then one of them came over to talk to me. She said she thought she knew me from somewhere, but she wasn't sure where. As we spoke she realised that she had seen me playing for Iona once and she remembered in particular the piece where I had played with four drumsticks! In the few minutes that we talked she said how she had seen in her spirit at the time that I was, quite literally, destroying demonic forces as I drummed! I was so encouraged. Here I was, in another time and place, wondering about the value of my gift, and the Lord

had engineered this special moment to encourage me and to remind me of His power in and through my drumming. I went back into the party with renewed faith, and worshipped Him amid all the unpleasantness that surrounded me.

Let your drumming become a voice that builds up the church and stands as a light in the world. Let God's Word shape the language of your playing, and always seek His wisdom and revelation to be creative in expressing the fullness of the things He has ordained for you to say. Don't just make a beat; say something that you mean as you play.

As you drum, move in the authority of God's Word to celebrate, to praise, to worship, to prophesy, to speak of freedom and to declare God's sovereignty.

The word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep

**in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in
awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He
commanded, and it stood fast.**

(Psalm 33:4–9)

**Let them praise His name with the dance; let
them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and
harp.**

(Psalm 149:3)

