

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

WITH THE KIDS

The bang's all here

Be quiet? Don't touch? You won't hear that at a Rhythm Child drum circle.

By Brenda Rees
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In a grassy area of Hancock Park, kids and parents rummage through big blue plastic bins that contain small West African-style drums (*djembes*), beaded gourds (*shekeres*), tambourines and collections of goat hoofs.

Kids give a perfunctory shake, pound and tap on sound shapes, lollipop drums and assorted vegetable shakers before deciding on the right instrument. Hurrying over to a shaded area, families find seats at this Rhythm Child drum circle, where leader Norman Jones is thumping away on his own *djembe*.

"Come on! Join the drum circle!" entices Jones as families get settled. "Let's see what kind of music we can make today."

Indeed, making music is at the heart of Rhythm Child, an organization Jones, a 40-year-old Culver City musician, started with his wife, Heather, almost two years ago. The idea is to introduce young kids to the rudimentary elements of music in a family drum circle experience.

After starting with workshops, Rhythm Child has expanded into a variety of parent-and-me-style classes, along with monthly family jams, regular presentations at local schools and mini-concerts around town.

They've been semi-regulars here at LACMA's Family Sundays events, with workshops scheduled for Sunday and May 1. Rhythm Child is also on the lineup at this year's Los Angeles Times Festival of Books on Saturday.

For Jones, the drum circle experience is a different one each time he leads either a small class of kids or more than 200 folks in a family jam. "I really love being in the middle of what looks like chaos," he says. "I really never know what we're going to do next. I just let it all flow."

Back at Hancock Park, there's a cacophony of tapping, clicking, drumming and pounding before Jones launches into a funky drum beat pattern. Everyone follows the hypnotic rhythms for a while before Jones suddenly shouts out, "Rhythm Child rumble!"

Participants bob up and down as they pound and shake instruments in a frenzy. Jones then instructs everyone to see how quietly they can drum. Finally, he says, "Let's get louder!" and the whole drum circle explodes with infectious rhythms and exotic beats.

Like the Pied Piper, Jones leads kids and families through a 45-minute experience that ends with a parade around the park. As participants put instruments back into the bins, adults seem to be smiling as much as the kids.

"Some of these things can be kind of boring for parents, but [Jones] really makes music playful and lively," says Olga Generalova, who brought her 5 1/2 -year-old daughter, Nastasya, and her friends. "This also teaches them about cooperation and how to listen and make music together. It's just a lot of fun too. We all had a good time."

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Rhythm Child

What: *Rhythm Child family drum circles*

When: *1 p.m. Sunday and May 1*

Where: *LACMA, 590 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles*

Price: *Free with museum admission (\$9 adults, free for children under 17)*

Info: *(310) 204-5466*

Also

What: *Rhythm Child at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books*

When: *3 p.m. Saturday*

Where: *Reading by 9 Storytelling Stage, UCLA campus*

Price: *Free admission; campus parking \$7*