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Crème

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This takes some beating

African group drumming is the corporate in-thing, says **Rosalind Renshaw**

Organisers wanting to lay on something special for a company bash are spoilt for choice these days. You can opt for lookalikes, or waiters who burst into operatic song. You can choose team-building events, which mean that delegates practise circus acts, drive around racetracks or make designer dresses.

But perhaps the most unusual, and catching on fast at company conferences, is... wait for it... group drumming, African-style.

Drum Café was founded in South Africa as a nightclub act. But, five years on, it has organised group drumming events all over the world for companies, charities and even the United Nations, and now has an office in London.

"It does sound very bizarre," admits Brett Schlesinger, managing director. "At the start of an event, delegates are always sceptical. No one wakes up in the morning and thinks, 'Yippee, I'm going to be doing some drumming today'."

"But by the end of a session it's a completely different story. Last week, we did a drumming session in Leicester for a teacher-training company, and it finished with a three-minute standing ovation. People just love it."

"We have laid on 3,500 drumming sessions in 19 countries. George Bush has drummed with us, as has Bill Clinton, Prince Charles and Nelson Mandela. We did one session for 300 sheep vets, and another for 500 Merrill Lynch accountants. We get



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booked entirely by word of mouth."

But what is the purpose of drumming? Schlesinger says that it creates team spirit. "The energy required to get a drum circle going is pretty much what a company requires to function," he says. "Some sessions we have done have been huge — our biggest was for 3,500 people. Often, it is the very first time that all of a company has managed to get together, but we have also done sessions for just 15 top management people."

Each drumming session typically lasts an hour, and starts with every delegate being given a West African "djembe"

drum. Delegates are given basic training and within minutes become an African drumming orchestra.

Schlesinger says: "It forms a powerful way of releasing creative energy while at the same time reducing stress levels and encouraging focus and clarity of thinking, making the group more receptive to listen and learn... and it is great fun."

"Drum circles help to break down barriers such as age, seniority, gender, culture and ability, and they're excellent ice-breakers for unfamiliar groups. Everyone finds themselves on an equal footing, unlike many other forms of team-building which focus on physi-

cal ability. The whole concept is unusual and unexpected."

Corporations such as Barclays, Nike, Microsoft, Siemens, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Coca-Cola and many more have all used drumming sessions, but what do delegates actually make of it?

Annette Milne, of the television facility company London Playout Centre, chose to put on a drumming event in July. "I had been desperately looking for an event that would be team-building but not too corporate — and most of all, fun," she says. "Sixty of us went, and it was purely a staff event. We were divided into groups of three, taken away and

taught a piece of music before being brought back together."

"The sound of everyone drumming was amazing. It felt most invigorating once we were in the rhythm of it. It was surprisingly difficult to do, though, and there were some sore hands the next day."

Milne admits that most people initially were cynical about drumming. The majority were won over and thoroughly enjoyed it, she says, but about three people in the group did not see the sense or benefit of it. Nevertheless, she says: "We are already planning another drumming event next year."

www.drumcafe.com