

Peter Welch's up interest in music

Known for its captivating rhythm, the djembe has been played by generations of West Africans.

Peter Welch fell in love with the drum's distinctive sound more than 20 years ago and now shares his passion with others.

He runs drumming workshops for adults in and around Church Stretton, Ludlow, Bishop's Castle and Shrewsbury.

Music has always been part of his life and he was introduced to African culture and music by his brother, who had completed his National Service in Kenya.

While attending a workshop offering an insight into South African and West African culture, he tried his hand at playing the djembe for the first time.

"I was hooked," says Peter. "I really loved the sound of the drums, the fantastic rhythms and the traditions," he explains.

The djembe is a goblet-shaped, wooden drum with goat skin on the top, pulled tight by ropes, and is played by hand.

It's often accompanied by dun-duns, base drums, which are made from wood, topped with cow skin and played with sticks.

Over the years, Peter has performed in West African drum and dance groups Yiri Baa and Kakandé – and with other world music bands – Carnival Collective and Kunundrum.

In 2005, he began teaching other people interested in learning how to play the djembe, which has been an integral part of spiritual and ritualistic life in West Africa for many generations.

He had been running regular workshops for adults in the south of England before moving to the Church Stretton area in 2019.

As The Drum Coach, Peter now runs sessions in Church Stretton, Ludlow and Bishop's Castle and also offers one-to-one drumming coaching. He also takes part in events at local arts festivals and stages outdoor performances.

At every workshop, he offers 15-minute taster sessions giving people the chance to have a go before deciding whether to stay for the full hour.

Participants learn about the core West African rhythms, starting with the easier ones, and building up to more complicated patterns.

"We start slowly before building up speed and technique. It's not hard to learn the basics, as long as you've got a sense of rhythm and you're good at retaining information," explains Peter.

Students are also taught how to hit the drum to bring out the right sound – and how not hurt themselves, how the various drum parts connect with each other how the dun duns – the bass drums – underpin the djembe rhythms.

Peter, who is also a qualified personal development coach, gives people an insight into some of the origins of the drum and the rhythms used in West African culture.

More experienced players can take on more complex patterns plus drum signals and soloing.

"As people get more experienced, or if they have played before, I tailor the workshops and what we are playing to that experience," explains Peter.

He says participants learn mainly by having fun and playing together in small groups to ensure individual progress.

Peter likes to encourage participants to record workshops, make notes and to plan to practice in between workshops to get the most out of the sessions.

"In West Africa, they learn through repetition, but



Drumming coach Peter Welch who runs workshops throughout Shropshire



One of Peter's workshops



Peter demonstrates his technique

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I prefer to break it down into chunks and we build it up layer upon layer so we can retain it.

"We play it at a slower pace to begin with and then we will start to speed it up,"

says Peter, who is also a qualified personal development coach.

"I enjoy sharing these rhythms in a way that's accessible in a friendly and fun learning environment. I think people like it because it's fun and it's something a bit different," he adds.

Peter is also continuously learning by attending workshops himself. "I have visited Senegal and The Gambia regularly, to learn from the world's drum masters, including the late Mamady Keita, Babara Bangoura, Sidiki Dembelé, Seckou Keita and Hans Sutton," he explains.

Earlier this month, he attended the World Music Drumcamp in Suffolk, where top musicians from Ivory Coast, The Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, Brazil took to the stage. The Drum Coach was set up as

a not-for-profit enterprise and Peter makes regular donations to The Amadu Bansang Jobarteh School Of Music in The Gambia as well as various other good causes.

Founded in 1996 by Sanjally Jobarteh, the school aims to promote and cultivate knowledge, expertise and an innate pride in culture and tradition amongst the young people.

"It's a lovely school. Children learn all about their own culture, drumming, dance, storytelling and costumes," says Peter.

He is also one of four teachers at the Shrewsbury West African Drumming Community group, which meets every Sunday afternoon, between 4-7 pm at the Meole Brace Peace Memorial Hall

For more information, visit thedrumcoach.org and to learn more about the Shrewsbury West African Drumming Community, see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/835593001508076>

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