



# Layne Redmond & Tommy Brunjes

## *Dance With the Duo of France*

Frame drums are the oldest drums known to mankind. We're talking old here, like before rock and roll, before the drive-thru, before elastic waistbands, and before Christ — 6,000 years before Christ. Just between the debut of opposable thumbs and when Keith Richards could legally buy beer. Mind-boggling, isn't it? Luckily, Layne Redmond and Tommy Brunjes are here now as projectors of appreciation for this enduring tool of cultural expression.

Layne Redmond is a master of the craft, an author of the tradition, a teacher of the trade, and an explorer of the possibilities. She began her frame drum journey under the wing of some guy named Glen Velez, who showed her the way of the drum, and how to earn a living playing it. Her book, *When the Drummers were Women*, is a detailed account of the frame drum and women's role throughout its complex history. She has produced two instructional videos, has her own line of Remo percussion, and has now released her fourth CD, *Trance Union*, — a frame drumming duo with Tommy Brunjes.

*by Jared Cobb*



Brunjes, who was primarily a set player, met Redmond in 1993 when he tracked her down for a lesson.

He had just returned from touring with PM Dawn as a midi technician and was looking to leave the cold realm

of stadium rock in search of less commercial music that could help pave a path of consciousness and add meaning to people's lives. They traveled to Brazil together in 1996 to participate in a religious festival, and their pilgrimage into the spirituality of percussion has flourished ever since.

*Trance Union* is a recording of the percussive rhythms that Redmond and Brunjes cover in their extensive clinics, workshops, and performances. The album, recorded in their studio/home in Chiefland, Florida, is much more than two people tapping on frame drums for 54 minutes. The intricate collaboration, educated instrumentation, and masterful execution of these captivating and thought provoking rhythms is more

than enough to warrant lengthy discussion with these two frame drumming virtuosos.

**Layne Redmond**

**Tommy Brunjes**

**DRUM!:** *Can we start by touching on the historical significance of the frame drum?*

**Redmond:** The history of the frame drum is extremely fascinating and along with the sistrum [a small metal rattle], it was the primary percussion instrument in all the ancient Mediterranean cultures. There's a wall painting in ancient Turkey depicting a frame drummer from 6,000 BC, so we know that the frame drum has been in use for at least 8,000 years. I believe its use stretches back into the Paleolithic. Based on the fact that almost every culture has some form of a frame drum, it appears to be an archetypal idea that people are inspired to create over and over again. There's something very powerful in that type of continuity. It must address some very primordial and basic human need to continue in use for so long.

Playing the frame drum along with a sistrum is our oldest method for altering consciousness. And we were really interested in ecstatic, trance dance rhythms when we recorded *Trance Union*.

**DRUM!:** *I'm intrigued by this "altered state of consciousness" concept. Please explain.*

**Redmond:** The frame drum historically accompanied the chanting of sacred prayers. Of course, when you say "prayer" today, that's going to call up a much different experience than what prayer was to ancient culture. To pray in the ancient world is to dance and chant prayer while people are playing the frame drum and other instruments. So it was a much more ecstatic experience. It's also at the heart of all the mystery schools, in which there was always a symbolic death and rebirth and the frame drum was used to create the trance in which people experienced the symbolic death — a dissolving of their personality. An experience would occur in the ritual and they would have a resurrection experience, socially or spiritu-

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ally. The drum and its rhythm provided a trance state for that whole experience to happen.

Shamanistic practices are even older than those religions we commonly know of and consider fully developed. People would go to shamans for different reasons, but basically they would go for healing. And once again it's a hypnotic method, a rhythmic sound. With the voice over it, it's a very standard hypnotic technique called double induction. You have a rhythmic sound going on and then chanting or speaking over that. The rhythm has the ability to move the conscious mind out of the way and allow the words to go down past the conscious mind — which is always evaluating and thinking and judging and deciding whether to let that information in. That part of the mind just gets moved out of the way and the words go into a more unconscious part of the mind where it can have a more direct affect.

**DRUM!:** *Are there common differences between the rhythms used for healing and those used for prayer, etcetera?*

**Redmond:** We don't know what rhythms they were playing. That's the thing.

**Brunjes:** There's no way of knowing that.

**DRUM!:** *Oh yeah, I guess there weren't 4-tracks back then. Dub.*

**Redmond:** All we know is the instrumentation. It's the sistrum and frame drum, cymbals, and often these ivory clappers. What we discovered in our recording is that there's a very powerful aspect of the frame drum. The overtones are very prominent. It's an interesting problem because it makes tuning difficult. But we found that if you put a high-pitched metal sound — like jingles on a tambourine or a little metal shaker or rattles — with a frame drum, incorporating that high-pitched metal sound enables us to hear the overtones more clearly on the frame drum.

**Brunjes:** We were listening to a track where we recorded just a deep frame drum. Then we recorded these really high-pitched bells over them. And when we would put the track in, it would

sound as if it were enhancing the level of the overtones in the frame drum. When you didn't use the track with the bells, it would sound a little duller. It made me think that the ear was working kind of like the eye, the way our aperture opens to let in more light. Maybe when there are higher frequencies, the ear in some level opens up to that range. If you look at any percussion that involves deep low sounds in any culture, there's almost always some kind of high-pitched metallic sound with it — whether it's cymbals and hi-hats on a drum set or agogo bells or jingles on tambourines. There always seems to be that high frequency element somewhere.

**DRUM!:** *That's really fascinating actually.*

**Redmond:** It is, it is. We knew that these combinations were very, very old but having this experience while we were recording really clued us in to the fact that something very special was going on.

**DRUM!:** *What are the next steps you're taking with this?*

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**Redmond:** We're collecting bells and bowls and expanding our metal collection of things. I think we're just starting on this.

**Brunjes:** One of the areas I want to start exploring is this: We know that there are brainwaves and there are different brainwave rates.

There's work being done now where people are just listening to metronomes at different tempos to achieve these different brain states. And I think this is how the shamans did it. It's just a steady rhythm. It's not so much about a groove, it's just keeping a steady rhythm. The brain wave theta ... well Layne, you can probably explain this better.

**Redmond:** Theta is where people experience learning. They have expanded capacity to memorize. It's where people experience spontaneous healing, emotional or physical.

**Brunjes:** It's where the conscious and subconscious minds interface. So I'm looking at how that can be incorporated into drumming. I think a lot of it is happening anyway. If you think about what a 4-5 cycle is, it's kind of like eighth notes at 120-130 bpm. And a lot of times there's something going on in that region anyway, like a shaker. Anything that's keeping a steady pattern, be it a hi-hat or a shaker or whatever, there's something about it being an even, straight note that brings about that trance effect. I want to start paying more attention to that theme.

**Redmond:** The thing about theta is you can't stay awake in it very long. You mostly experience it as you're falling asleep and you have that strange semi-conscious dream. So the way people have traditionally stayed awake in it is to have their brain waves audibly driven into a vibrant sound, like drumming.

We have all these understandings, but when we sit down to make a recording we're not going, "Okay, we're going to take this tempo and try to make a theta state." We definitely don't do that. We're aware of all that stuff, but when we start to play we're looking to create a certain experience within ourselves. We created *Trance Union* completely for ourselves. [laughs] I wanted to love every moment on it. So that's how the music

was created. When we start to play, it's simply because the rhythm that we've chosen creates a feeling within us that we want.

**DRUM!:** *What was the most unorthodox element of recording Trance Union?*

**Redmond:** On *Trance Union*, the drums were carefully tuned not only to each other, but also to a drone. We created a drone bed to go with the drums by using a tanpura (the traditional stringed drone instrument of India), bullroarers (a whirled string instrument that creates a humming sound), or Tibetan singing bowls. A melody then arose from the interplay of the overtones of the drums and the overtones of the drone.

**Brunjes:** When two frame drums have a fundamental pitch that are in harmony with each other, the series of overtones that arise from each drum is also in harmony. The different strokes, fingers, and

dynamics used on the frame drum produce constantly shifting melodies created by the interplay of these harmonics. So playing a rhythm automatically produces a melody. This provides the key aspect of our sound.

**DRUM!:** *How did you go about composing these tracks? Which elements came first and which were filled in later?*

**Redmond:** The first element was choosing the rhythm, followed by choosing the appropriate drum. The frame drums we used ranged in size from the 4" South Indian kanjira, on up through the tars, bendirs, and tambourines, to the 22" Celtic bodhran. Tommy also played conga, djembe, and dumbek. The next step was bringing in the second drum to create a counterpoint rhythm/melody. Once we had our two core drums, we laid down the basic track playing live together. Everything else was overdubbed to this basic track to preserve a live feel.

**Brunjes:** We didn't use a click track at

Layne Redmond  
Tommy Brunjes

## Favorite Recordings of Layne Redmond and Tommy Brunjes

*Traditional Ethiopian Instrumental (Ethio Sound)* by **Mesele Asmamaw** — This is our favorite new recording.

*Worotan (World Circuit)* or anything by **Oumou Sangare** from Mali — Don't miss any chance to see this woman perform live.

*Bhaktimala, Shiva Vol. 2 (Music Today)* by **Veena Sahasrabudhe, Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha** — Veena is an incredible singer from North India and the Gundecha brothers are carriers of the old lineage of Drupad music from North India.

*A Wish (Sounds True)* by **Hamza El Din** — A great Nubian musician, Hamza is one of our earliest frame drum influences.

*Olho De Peixe (Velas)* by **Lenine E. Suzano** — Suzano has revolutionized the pandeiro, the Brazilian tambourine.

*Afro-Cuba: A Musical Anthology (Rounder)* — Some powerful traditional drumming.

*Niafunke (World Circuit)* or anything by **Ali**

**Farka Toure** — Toure is a legendary guitarist from Mali.

*Sif Safaa: New Music from the Middle East (Hemisphere)* — Great Middle Eastern pop music.

*Beleza Tropical (Luka Bob, Inc.)* compiled by David Byrne — Great Brazilian pop music from the 70s and early 80s.

*Legend (Island Records)* by **Bob Marley and the Wailers**

*Capoeira (Warner Music Brazil)* by **Mestre Suassuana E. Dircuo** — Traditional drumming, chanting, and berimbau percussion that accompanies the Brazilian martial art practice of Capoeira.

*Brasileiro (Electra)* by **Sergio Mendes** — Mendes collaborates with some of the greatest musicians from Brazil.

*Denké-denké (Daqui)* by **Marmar Kassey** — An incredible group from Niger with amazing drumming.

*Out There (Prestige/New Jazz)* by **Eric Dolphy**



all in this recording. In fact I'm adamantly opposed to the concept of using a click track, although I've done it on many studio gigs. On this recording it wasn't a possibility because we intended the tempo of the piece to move with the energy of the sections, to have a natural breathing quality.

**Redmond:** I always practice with a metronome and I think it is a crucial skill to have because many recording situations require you to play with prerecorded tracks.

**Brunjes:** And it's invaluable in developing a strong, steady sense of time. But recording music to a click track suppresses a natural feel.

**Redmond:** Some of my favorite recordings are Aretha Franklin's songs of the late '60s when her voice drove her ensemble.

**DRUM!:** *What are the differences between the first versions you recorded and the final version?*

**Brunjes:** Clarity and separation are the major differences. It took listening to the first mixed version to understand what would make it sound better.

**Redmond:** Plus we just felt we could do a better job on some of the tracks and we rerecorded.

**DRUM!:** *How elaborate was the mixing process for Trance Union?*

**Brunjes:** Mixing is absolutely crucial. The challenging part is that there are so many textural layers and drones, including the drones of the drums, the slightest change in balance of the levels of the instruments made drastic changes in the overall sound.

**DRUM!:** *Are there any common misconceptions you know of concerning miking hand percussion?*

**Redmond:** One thing we did with this recording is using room mikes with close miking.

**Brunjes:** That's true. I knew from recording drum set that ambient miking was usually harder. And most percussion recording I had done was with close miking, but for us it really added a lot. It added much more of a feeling of being in the room with the instrument.

**Redmond:** No one that I've recorded with has done that with the frame drum. Usually the issue is whether to record

from the front or back. This just gave a much better feeling of having that drum in your hand.

**DRUM!:** *How do you achieve such clarity and dynamics with the frame drum?*

**Redmond:** There's only one thing: You just do it over and over and over again. The reason I have such clarity is I teach the basics over and over again two weekends a month. How can I do that and still make it interesting for myself? I have to pay complete attention to my sound. I'm usually miked, so people can hear me clearly, and it's very important for my sound to project and frame drums are not projection instruments. There's no way you could lead a drum circle with a frame drum, you just couldn't do that.

**Brunjes:** Unless it was all frame drums. [laughs] One djembe in the mix and it's all over.

**Redmond:** Yeah. [laughs] So it's just completely mindful repetition at the level of basics that nobody would do out of choice. I would never spend the whole weekend working on my basic strokes and the basic combinations of those strokes, but that's what I do. It's what it always boils down to — it's practice. But I would never do that on my own.

**Brunjes:** You'd normally work on something you *can't* do.

**Redmond:** Right, right. You normally wouldn't work on something you already know over and over again. But teaching is a different thing and it's rewarding. And it's what I need to do to teach non-drummers to be obsessive and repetitive. Because that's it, that's what drummers are, they're obsessive and repetitive. It's the only way you get good. There's no more healthy way to channel obsessive and repetitive behavior than playing drums. [laughs]

**DRUM!:** *What kind of home practice schedule do you follow?*

**Brunjes:** I play often but without any schedule. In terms of preparing for a performance, we schedule rehearsals. Most of our playing just comes from being inspired. There are drums everywhere in the house so it's very easy to pick one up and spend 30 minutes playing in the hallway.

**Redmond:** Basically the same for me. I do have specific exercises I warm up on

and I always work with my metronome for that. If we're recording or working on a performance, I may take one rhythm and play it for a long time with the metronome. Playing with the metronome has always been a pleasurable experience for me, really a trance-inducing experience.

**DRUM!:** *Do you incorporate any non-drumming exercises into your practice regime?*

**Redmond:** All the other things we do affect our bodies and therefore our playing abilities. I've been practicing yoga for 30 years now. Over the years I've also spent time in extended Zen-style meditation retreats. This is a type of meditation in which you cut your thoughts and the mind becomes clear and calm. I've never found a better state of mind to play from. My least satisfying moments of performing occur when I let anxieties and fears about making mistakes take over my mind. Pranayama (yogic breathing exercises) have also been very powerful. Often I'm conscious of my students or other performers holding their breath while they play. Particularly when they're approaching a part of the music that is difficult or when they take a solo.

Training yourself to keep an even breathing rhythm stabilizes your sense of time and your confidence.

**DRUM!:** *What is the most important aspect of your workshops that you want participants to walk away with?*

**Brunjes:** In every workshop we teach every technique that we know. We teach the basic strokes, then stroke combinations, then we start working with different rhythms. Then we break down and demonstrate every advanced technique that we use. Learning how something is done is different from being able to do it. The participants must then put in the practice time to accomplish what we've taught them.

**Redmond:** All the master teachers I've studied with show me rhythms and insist that I try to play them exactly as they do. This is the ancient way to transmit rhythmic information and I follow in my teachers' footsteps. In that sense I'm a complete authoritarian. I insist that students learn the correct fingering and the rhythm in the way that I've been taught. For me, improvising happens way down the line after years of practice. Some

Layne Redmond  
&  
Tommy Brunjes



## Tar Duet in Ten

by Layne Redmond & Tommy Brunjes

When playing a rhythm in ten over a walking pulse that divides time into four beats, it takes a total of 20 beats to have the first beat of the ten pattern come out on the pulse of your walking. Practice the basic pattern in Ex. 1 in ten beats until you really have it locked time-wise. Set your metronome to pulse every four beats, which will correspond to your walking pulse. Assume the dominant hand is the right. Left-handers make adjustment. In the following exercises count the thumb as 1, index finger as 2, middle finger as 3, ring finger as 4 and little finger as 5.

Practice the routine for two tars: a high tar and a low tar. The structure for the two tars is:

- 8 measures: High tar is on Ex. 1. At the beginning of measure 5, the low tar comes in on Ex. 1.
- 4 measures: High tar is on Ex. 1 while low tar is on Ex. 2.
- 8 measures: High tar alternates between Ex. 1 and 2, while low tar reversed, alternating between Ex. 2 and 1.
- 4 measures: High tar and low tar in unison on Ex. 1.
- 4 measures: High tar is on Ex. 3 and low tar is on Ex. 5.
- 8 measures: High tar alternates between Ex. 3 and 4, while low tar alternates between Ex. 5 and 6.
- 4 measures: High tar alternates between Ex. 2 and 5, while low tar alternates between Ex. 4 and 3.
- 8 measures: High tar plays Ex. 1 and low tar plays Ex. 2.
- 8 measures: High tar and low tar plays Ex. 1. At the beginning of these eight measures, start a slow fade that concludes at the end of the eighth measure.

You can practice these rhythms by mixing them up any way that you like.



### Basic Strokes:

K = Kah, full-handed slap that hits and sticks to drum

D = Doum, ring or fourth finger hits head and bounces off on tambourine

T = Tak, tip of fourth finger hits rim and sticks.

t = an unaccented Tak with the fourth finger, close to a ghost note.

Ex. 1: D t t T t t D t T t

r l l r l l r l r l

Ex. 2: D t t T t D t T t t

r l l r l r l r l l

Ex. 3: D t t K t t D K t K

r l l r l l r r l r

Ex. 4: D K t K D t t K t K

r r l r r l l r l r

Ex. 5: D t K t D t t K t K

r l r l r l l r l r

Ex. 6: D T t T t t D t T t

r l r l r l l r l l

styles of techniques do take several years to develop, but we don't hold information back. I project that I expect people to learn rapidly, and they do.

**DRUM!:** *What can a disciplined drum set player gain from picking up hand drumming?*

**Brunjes:** More gigs! It took me a relatively short period of time to gain a fairly wide facility on hand percussion because the rhythms were already in my mind and body and it was simply a matter of training through very focused practice. It's very convenient to practice frame

drum techniques in terms of portability and volume. You can always carry a frame drum with you.

**DRUM!:** *The phrase "more accessible to the listener" is popping up more and more in hand percussion recordings. Should we be concerned about diluting traditional music in order to make a buck?*

**Redmond:** We consider ourselves composers who are influenced by traditional music from many cultures but we feel we are creating contemporary music. My recordings have always been the music or meditation practices that I teach or per-

form.

**Brunjes:** Our goal is to create the music we ourselves want to hear without considering whether it is commercial or not. Those who like it are the ones we created it for.

Visit [www.LayneRedmond.com](http://www.LayneRedmond.com) for clinic and workshop dates and info, to purchase Trance Union and other CDs, videos, and books, or just to learn more about the frame drum.