



Young festival-goers at Doris

# One World, One Tribe

**At Tribe of Doris, Will Gethin discovers the joys of transcultural communion through music and dance**

Sitting on a raised central platform in a large white tent is a dreadlocked Brazilian drummer in a garish panama hat, bright red sunglasses, and a cream linen jacket. He tantalises the crowd with a blitz of samba rhythms, beaded necklaces whipping his bare chest as he beats his drum in a frenzy. The audience whoop as an African elder hops on stage, jamming alongside, and further applause greets three Moroccans brandishing castanets as they twirl in Fez hats and hooded jalabas. A Mexican dancer leaps lithely into the air as crowds from the audience sweep in, merging with the performers, to create a jiving mass.

"Jump!" cries the drumming Brazilian. "jump!" And we're euphorically jumping with him to the cacophonous surge of beats, bells, whistles and rattles as the transcultural fiesta raises the roof. It's Friday night at Tribe of Doris, the world's most vibrant multicultural exchange of acoustic music, dance, song and ceremony. Here in the Blackdown Hills of North Devon, this six day fusion of summer camp and festival (now in its 18th year) is building momentum as weekenders, arriving for tonight's 'Latin performance' showcase, are treated to this spectacular transcultural digression. 'Doris' – as regulars fondly call it – is primarily a participatory event catering for over 40 workshops a day in drumming, dance and voice, featuring inspirational teachers from Africa, South America, Asia, Europe and

all corners of the globe. Learning from these amazing artists is the core activity, interspersed with performance nights like this, open mic performances, fireside jamming, elaborate ceremonies, a health and relaxation zone and a host of creative children's activities, from circus skills to digital recording.

## Universal whirl

Setting up camp Monday night, my programme kicked off with the Intermediate African Djembe drumming the following morning (drumming classes range from 'Absolute Beginners' to 'Advanced'). "Me, I am So So," our teacher Ibro Soumah introduced himself. Patting his Djembe with the flat of his palm, his dreadlocks spilled over the shoulders of his rainbow tie-dye t-shirt. So So is a tribe in Guinea, where Ibro lived before meeting his English wife at a drum camp in Ghana two years ago. Leading us into a Guineafari rhythm, Ibro's drumming produced a powerful smack sound, deep and hollow, and as we struggled to keep rhythm, he became increasingly frustrated. "Come on!" he'd jovially jibe before vocalising the beat sequence to illustrate: "Boodoo-ba, boodoo-ba, booda-ba, booda-ba, boodoo-ba, bing...Unh?" And another round would begin...

In the afternoon, I attended a Sufi whirling workshop with Sheikh Ahmad Dede, an Indonesian from Holland who is the Sufi whirling representative of the eminent Naqshbandi order of Sufism; he is charged with spreading the ancient tradition of the



Whirling Dervishes, as founded by 13th century Persian poet and mystic Rumi. Dressed in a sheikh's destar, dervish hat and baggy Ali Baba trousers, Sheikh Ahmad – whose wispy beard and glasses gave him the air of a quixotic professor – began by explaining how everything in the universe whirls, like the sun and moon whirling round the Milky Way. He then elucidated on the message of love behind whirling. "When we whirl, we ask for help to receive divine love, to selflessly give it away, to create a better world," he said, his voice pure and radiant. "So imagine you're being embraced in the arms of the beloved, or someone who loves you – it's like the heart connection between a mother and her child. Open your heart to pure love, whirl like the child, be free."

By now, a fellow dervish in a sikke high hat is whirling across the tent swathed in a tight white jacket and bell-like skirt that rises and

Photos courtesy: Helen Jane Cooke



One of the many energetic dance classes.

flails as he spins with swift revolving steps, a mesmerising spectacle. His right arm is raised, palm open, the left arm tilted like a teapot, palm pointing down. "You ask for love to come in through the right hand," Sheikh Ahmad explained, "the left hand then channelling the love back into the earth. Give all without discrimination. The more you give your love away, the more you receive. And when we chant, sing with all your heart. When a mother sings to her child, the words aren't important, it's the depth of passion and feeling expressed from the heart that touches it."

Walking around the tent, now singing impassioned, Sheikh Ahmad tenderly touched the shoulders of each student in turn. 'La illaha, illa llah' ('there is only one God'), he chanted, the beautiful words pulling on our heart strings as some people started to cry. Over the next hour, we whirled three times, serenaded by Sheikh Ahmad and stirring live New Age folk music, sometimes chanting as we spun – 'La illaha, illa llah' – spinning faster and faster, all the while downloading love energy and transmitting it back into the earth. "The strongest healing power is the love power, it's your reason for living," Sheikh Ahmad said following the final whirl.

## Circus skills

Feeling wonderfully loved up after whirling, I drifted downhill through the youth area to the omnipresent sound of drum beats, as ahead in the distance, the immense green woodlands of the Blackdown Hills sprawled like a magnificent Amazon rainforest.

I watched children playing on unicycles, stilts and trampolines outside the Jedi Circus tent, while others attended to metal work, Masai jewellery making and mask making in the Arty Farty tent. Lured to the Jamma De Samba tent by a thrilling discordant onslaught of Samba rhythms, whistles, shakers and cowbells, I joined a line of drummers, and picking up the beat – badda-badda-boom, boom-boom-boom, badda-badda-boom – my spirits surged, immersed in the creative flow of this rhythmical pandemonium.

Over the coming days, I attended daily workshops in African drumming and whirling and evening showcase performances – in between soaking up the ubiquitous multicultural vibes, hanging out in the cafes, enjoying global cuisine and browsing stalls

vending global merchandise. I dropped into other workshops, including an Animal Spirit Dance which used dance and visualisation to tap into the subconscious mind.

Showcase performance highlights included a concert from Gnawa musicians from Morocco (practitioners of a Sufi musical-spiritual tradition), who chanted, twirled and wailed like banshees to the hypnotic rhythms of the guimbri (three stringed lute). They later performed an all night Lila healing ceremony, traditionally used for pacifying djinn, evil spirits.

In addition to showcase performances from the event's stars, Doris has a culture of micro-fame, whereby everyone has the chance to perform, the open mic cafe displaying a rolling wealth of talent. I'm blown away on the Friday night, when stumbling upon a tipi cafe at 1am, I find a random gathering of punters immersed in a spontaneous jam – the majority using makeshift percussion or their voices to create a remarkably congruent improvised orchestra, a work of creative genius!

At the final Saturday morning drumming workshop, Ibro prepares the group for tonight's gala ceremony, the festival's grand crescendo when the various workshop tribes come together to showcase what they have learnt during the week. Guiding us through a megamix of the various drumming rhythms we've covered, Ibro is thrilled when we complete the set without blundering. "Yes!" he



Learn hula skills at Tribe of Doris.

cries, jumping to his feet ecstatic. He throws his drum into the air and holds it high above his head like a trophy. "Thank you everyone, I am happy!" he beams.

Later perusing the Healing Fields, I decide to try a Reiki healing. "Doris is obviously good for you, the energy's bouncing off you!" grins Reiki Master Helen, who will soon be leaving her banking job to extend her training in holistic therapies. And it seems I'm not the only one Doris is good for. "It's been one of the most amazing times of my life," Helen says, "it's like the best of the festivals. You get high from all the music, drumming and dancing, I've felt so empowered. But tomorrow it's back to the concrete buildings and the bank where I work, full of unhappy people...now if they were to try all this, it could transform them!"

Wandering the site, I ask others how they feel about Doris. "Have you heard of Doris moments?" asks Nanna Lundqvist, who is visiting from Sweden for the fifth consecutive year. "They're like tearful moments where you're like – 'This is amazing!' – and you feel so happy. I need more of this in my life and I feel huge gratitude for this opportunity for sharing with others."

"I've been coming for 12 years and it's transformed my life," says star performer Claudio Kron, a Samba and Brazilian percussion teacher from Brazil. "Meeting so many great people and exchanging cultural values, it reaches deep into your life for many years to come." And there really is something deeply nourishing about this multicultural exchange – this communion through music, dance and song with seemingly separate races, where any differences are celebrated and integrated into the whole. As Sheikh Ahmad says: "The spirit of ...Doris is divine, it's the spirit of connection, we are all one."

"Doris creates peace and happiness by communing through music, dance and song," declares African elder Adesose Wallace, master of ceremonies for the Sunday morning closing ceremony. "This is the future, one tribe. When you create something special like this, you don't let it die. Take this peace and happiness with you out into the world. Set an example, be the tribe." <sup>ks</sup>

## More information

Dates: for Tribe of Doris 2011 are Tuesday 9th - Sunday 14th August.

Tickets: Adults £220 / Young People 18-21 £150; Youths 11-17 £75 / Children 5-10 £60; under 5 FREE. 10% discount for groups of six adults or more all booking at the same time / families of any two adults and four children. Small green tax of £5 for parking / £25 for campervan/live-in vehicle payable on arrival.

Tickets available via [www.theticketsellers.co.uk](http://www.theticketsellers.co.uk) / concessions and tickets paid by instalments available from [admin@tribeofdoris.co.uk](mailto:admin@tribeofdoris.co.uk) or 0845 458 0190. For further information contact Tribe of Doris: [www.tribeofdoris.co.uk](http://www.tribeofdoris.co.uk); 0845 458 0190; [doris@tribeofdoris.co.uk](mailto:doris@tribeofdoris.co.uk)