

9th May 2011
Bipolar Glasgow Workshop



Left to right- Tom, Anne, Jackie, Jess and Eileen



Buddy Beat took to the road once more and this latest adventure was for the benefit of Bipolar Glasgow. Buddy Beat are no strangers to Bipolar Scotland for we were booked to play at their annual conference in Perth in September 2009 and that was a memorable day for the gang. When Bipolar Scotland then held their 2010 annual conference in Glasgow, they once again asked if we would come along and play. That was in September, right in the middle of our schedule for making the “Keep the Beat...Our Journey in Rhythm” film, and Bipolar Scotland kindly let us film part of our performance during the conference, and that can be seen on the finished film.

Bipolar Scotland run support groups from Stranraer to Fife and seek to provide information, support and advice for people affected by bipolar disorder/manic depression and all who care, to promote self help throughout Scotland and to inform and educate about the illness and organisation. If anyone wishes to look and see the good work that Bipolar Scotland provide, then please check-out their website www.bipolarscotland.org.uk

Having seen us play at their conference, Bipolar Scotland vice-chair George Cairns said “We want some of that!” and made an enquiry through Jane, asking if we would attend one of their regular Monday night meetings and give a musical workshop for 12 or so of their members. Well, how could we possibly refuse? Jane began to collect names from the group and The Buddy Beat were:-

Jane Bentley, Tom Chalmers, Anne Dowie, Jackie McDowall, With Eileen McGrory, Jess McMillan and Christine Robertson.

Our Jess came straight from her work and was first there and was later joined by Tom and Anne. Just as the same time Taxi Christine pulled up with Jackie and Eileen in tow, George Cairns was on hand to let them into the Charles Reid Centre while we awaited Jane. We were all early and soon enough Jane and her Beloved Berlingo pulled up outside and she was helped with the bags & equipment by some of the Bipolar Glasgow members.

The room set aside for the meeting was filled with comfy leather couches which although sumptuous to sit on, are not really conducive to drumming, so we pushed several aside to make way for chairs. As 7.30 approached, the room filled up and we had 12 Bipolar Glasgow members in total and with seven of us that gave a healthy workshop circle of 19.



Eileen is not only loved by The Buddy Beat

The camera clearly does too!



George Cairns called things to order and made a few announcements to the group. He then mentioned that he was no stranger to The Buddy Beat and recalled when we had played at the Bipolar Scotland Conference in Perth in September 2009 and how we had totally energised that event. George joined us that same afternoon for a workshop, or masterclass as he preferred to call it and later that year he joined us at Paisley Museum for an Open Drum Circle which was run as part of the Renfrewshire Mental Health Arts & Film Festival. He handed the reins over to Jane and she firstly introduced the group asking each of us to give a little drum roll, say our name and mention what The Buddy Beat means to us. Eileen mentioned the friendship, Tom mentioned that it gives a focus and gets you out of the house while Jess said that it helps you forget all your worries.



“Hold on Anne, we may be doing some rockin’ drumming tonight!”

Then Jane asked Eileen to quote from her international best seller “How to play a Djembe” book and she quickly instructed everyone on the basics. Jane wasted no time and set everyone off telling them to listen and feel for the music. So off we went and very quickly everyone seemed to gel and the music ripped along, powerful and rhythmic and really enjoyable to be part of. We played for perhaps seven or eight minutes and the room absolutely bristled with energy. Jane looked quietly surprised by the sheer “connectiveness” of the assembled circle and when she brought it to a finish everyone looked very pleased with themselves. Certainly some of the circle looked a little apprehensive before we had started, but by the end of this opening jam there were plenty of relaxed and smiling faces all around.

A quick rub of the hands to freshen them up and Jane then had us playing a game. We passed a single beat around perhaps 3 times before Jane then instructed people that they could decide which way the beat was flowing as long as they looked clearly to the person on their right or left. This caused a lot of hilarity as often the beat was trapped in a section of the circle or between three people- and if you are the middle of a particular three it can be very intense! Stage three of this game came in the guise of adding the ability to zap the beat across the circle to anyone you wished, who would then decide if they were going to pass to their left or right or indeed, ping the beat across the room. This was great fun and certainly enjoyed by everyone.



Jane then asked anyone if they wished to swap drums or percussion and a few did so. Then Jane began to play a simple rhythm, and next Tom added something that fitted, but again simple, and next it was Anne to join in and so forth around the circle until we were all playing. Again we were rocking and Jane then asked for just the large drums to play. This allowed everyone a short respite while they could hear the large drums and then it was the turn of the smaller drums and finally the percussion. Each group really had their groove going and it was getting hotter in the room, as this exercise lasted a full ten minutes.



A Red Hot Chilli Banana sandwich- our Jackie, Anne and Eileen

A quick breather and further shake of the hands and Jane asked if anyone in Buddy Beat would like to suggest a game and quick as a flash Jackie piped up “Can we play Freeze/Go?” Jane thought that this would be something everyone would enjoy and Jackie quickly ran through the rules of the game. For those that don’t know, the group starts jamming and one person shouts “Freeze!” and of course we all have to stop. We can’t continue until a different person in the circle then shouts “Go!” This was great fun and everyone seemed to enjoy it, although to be fair, it was difficult at times to hear an instruction due to the fact that everyone was committed to the beat. That lasted a few minutes before Jane initiated stage two, adding that people could be creative with their instruction and we worked our way around loud, very very loud, quiet, slow, fast, incredibly fast, and rock and roll style. Its one of those games that we never really tire of and I think it is because we don’t really know what is coming next, and that gives you a wee thrill!

Jane finished this game with a frantic jam at first before mellowing things with the chimes and that is something that seems to bring child-like smiles out in people and to end took the volume back up to a deafening rumble and suddenly our time was up! Jane said she had so many games and exercises lined up but we simply ran out of time. George thanked us on behalf of the group and as we looked around we saw happy faces. That’s what it is all about. So that was another great little workshop and both Tom and Anne agreed that they had both worked hard in the jamming sessions, and that was all down to the terrific way that The Bipolar Glasgow group connected with us and the music. Smashing!





Lean on Me! Tom, Anne, Jackie and Jess



Words by Tom Chalmers and pictures taken by Tom, Eileen & Jane

